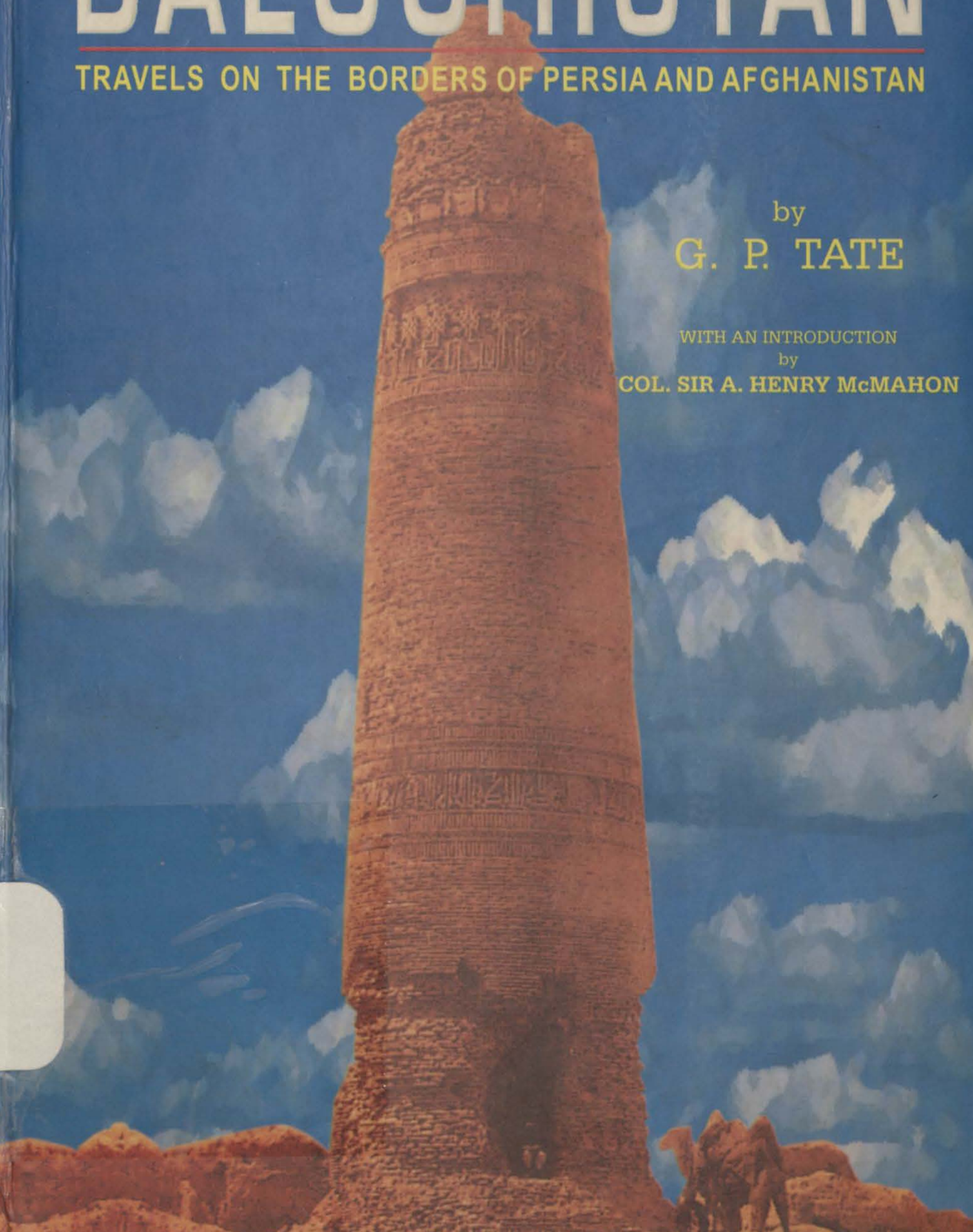
# THE FRONTIERS OF BALUCHISTAN

## TRAVELS ON THE BORDERS OF PERSIA AND AFGHANISTAN



by

G. P. TATE

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

by

COL. SIR A. HENRY McMAHON

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F.R.G.S., M.R.A.S., OF THE INDIAN SURVEYS

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K.C.I.E., C.S.I.

SANG-E-MEEL PUBLICATIONS

25, SHAHRAH-E-PAKISTAN (LOWER MALL) LAHORE.

954.915 G. P. Tate
The Frontiers of Baluchistan : Travels on the Borders of Persia and Afghanistan / int. by Col. Sir A. Henry Mcmahon. (K.C.I.E., C.S.I.).-Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2003.
xvi, 261p.
Index Included.
1. History - Pakistan - Baluchistan.
2. Baluchistan - History. I. Title.

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2003
Published by:
Niaz Ahmad
Sang-e-Meel Publications,
Lahore.

19 FEB 2021

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ISBN 969-35-1394-0

SANG-E-MEEL PUBLICATIONS
Chowk Urdu Bazar Lahore. Pakistan. Phone 7667970
Phones: 7220100 - 7228143 Fax: 7245101
http://www.sang-e-meel.com e-mail: smp@sang-e-meel.com
25 Shahrah-e-Pakistan (Lower Mall), P.O. Box 997 Lahore-54000 PAKISTAN
PRINTED AT: ZAHID BASHIR PRINTER, LAHORE.

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WITH A COLOURED FRONTISPIECE, THIRTY-SIX PLATES AND TWO MAPS

WITHERBY & CO.
326 HIGH HOLBORN LONDON
1909

TO MY WIFE

WITHOUT WHOSE CONSTANT ENCOURAGEMENT

AND ASSISTANCE

THIS BOOK WOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN WRITTEN.

# INTRODUCTION.

To lovers of Nature a desert ever presents peculiar fascination, and those who have once come under its spell can seldom free themselves from the longing to leave the crowded highways of civilization and return again to the untrodden regions of the silent wilderness.

In his "Frontiers of Baluchistan" the author furnishes us with many choice sketches of the desert and desert life painted in life-like colours, and with a fidelity such as none but a true child of the desert can attain to.

While one portion of the work deals with the vast desert which lies between Quetta and Persia, a wilderness which Nature appears from time immemorial to have determined should never be anything else, the other and larger portion describes that strangely interesting country of Seistan, which Nature has bounteously endowed with every gift of water and soil, and which has become a desert by man's own handiwork and folly.

The vast ruins, which everywhere in the latter region testify to a past prosperity and civilized population, both long since gone, give to the silence of the barren

wilderness in which they stand a sadness which can be but inadequately described in words.

Through both these regions, and also the present small inhabited portion of modern Seistan, Mr. Tate leads us with picturesque descriptions and interesting historical allusions.

Upon the many interesting incidents which marked the history of the Baluch-Afghan Boundary Commission, 1895-96, and the Seistan Arbitration Mission, 1903-5, with which Mr. Tate, as Survey Officer, traversed the various portions of the country dealt with in this book, he has felt himself debarred from touching.

He has, however, fully made up for lack of personal narrative by the strength and picturesque colouring of his portraiture of the country and people he describes.

A. HENRY McMAHON.

QUETTA,

*6th February*, 1909.

# PREFACE.

If the lives of human beings are shaped by a controlling and mysterious influence, then I must have been predestined to be a wanderer all my days, for my travels began at an age when most people are still in the nursery.

By the time I was ten years old I had traversed two sides of the triangle which has Calcutta and Karachi as the ends of its base and Abbottabad for its apex. Of the journey between Calcutta and Abbottabad I have no recollection, but of the journey from Abbottabad to Kushālgarh on the Indus, I retain a very clear impression, for I rode each day's stage along the frontier road on my pony, while my mother and a very small sister travelled in a doolie carried by bearers. At Kushālgarh we chartered two wide-beamed vessels manned by oarsmen, on which temporary dwellings had been erected, one for ourselves and the other for our servants and my pony. The tedium of our long journey down the river was broken by stoppages at several points where friends—and strangers also—extended a generous hospitality to the small party of voyagers.

Those were the days when the frontier was garrisoned

by regiments of the Frontier Force, and trans-border politics bulked largely as topics of conversation in the small stations along our marches. In this way there was laid in my mind the foundations of an interest in those countries and their affairs which has never been effaced. As we floated down the Indus, day after day was visible to the west, the lofty mountain barrier. Beyond the mountains lay a mysterious land of which very little was known. An occasional Indian explorer had at times, with considerable risk, brought back scanty though valuable geographical information, and the yearly caravans of Afghan traders alone gave an insight into affairs "at the back of beyond."

Life in the small frontier cantonments in those days was full of incident as the homes of the warlike and independent border clans in some cases lay within easy reach of our military settlements, and at times when a spirit of unrest was abroad it was unsafe to go unarmed. The conditions of our daily existence exercised an influence on my small mind, which was kept alive by the great camps of Povindah Afghans which we met on our voyage down the river to the point where it is joined by the five rivers of the Punjab. These camps were composed of women and lads whose husbands and fathers had gone further into India on business intent. As a rule, however, the vicinity of these camps was avoided by us, as we were too weak a party to accept any risks from such unruly folk.

"Once on the frontier always on the frontier," was a saying that used to be current in Anglo-Indian society. It has been fulfilled in my case. Many years passed since this memorable journey, and many of my holidays were spent within sight of the mountains to the west of the Indus. Then, again, later on I crossed the barrier, and the old fascination came over me with redoubled strength, and it has held me in a grip which no hardships have been able to loosen. For a series of years the Frontier of Baluchistan—and, as my friends of Khārān used to tell me, the desert—was my "home" for the greater part of each year. Though at intervals this connection has been temporarily interrupted, yet the fascination of the desert has again and again drawn me irresistibly back to it—inexplicable though that fascination has been to many of my friends.

It is not possible to analyse this feeling nor define it in exact terms. Something is due to the freer and more simple, if strenuous, existence, and a good deal also to the fact that when I made the acquaintance of these tracts they were to a very large extent either imperfectly or not at all known. Contact with the rude inhabitants revealed an utterly unexplored field for research in the folk-lore and tribal legends, with which I became conversant over the camp fires, or in lonely bivouacs among the hills. The presence of an insignificant explorer's retinue excited no fears in the minds of the people, nor was there any object to be gained by the assumption of

false appearances on their part. I saw them off their guard, and found much to interest me. An explorer's library, again, must needs be limited, and mine consisted of books of a solid and lasting description. Thrown on one's own resources for occupation, the powers of observation are rapidly developed, and not a day passed that did not provide work for the responsive fingers.

Finally, for me there was the burden of the daily task, but for which I should never have had the greatly appreciated opportunities that presented themselves at various times. A great deal of this work was completed under very considerable stress of circumstances that had to be overcome, and on which it is unnecessary to enlarge. At other times purely professional and scientific requirements had to be cheerfully subordinated to others of a wider and more important nature.

To those whose photographs I have used in this book to supplement the pictures which are my own handiwork I offer my best thanks.

G. P. TATE.

MUSSOORIE,

15*th December*, 1908.

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# CHAPTER I.

## BEFORE BRITISH RULE.

Causes which led to the first Exploration and opening up of Western Baluchistan—The Seistan Trade Route—Early Explorers, Pottinger and Christie—Sir Charles MacGregor and Captain Lockwood—Sir Robert Sandeman—The old order—Azād Khan, the freebooting Chieftain—Murder of Mir Sābik—Spoils from Maiwand—The famous desert guides—Chāgai—Legend of Balanosa and the Dragon.

Towards the close of the nineteenth century the revival of interest in the extreme western portions of our Indian Empire led, among other results, to the opening of overland trade relations with Persia. Since then the trade route from Quetta *viâ* Nushki to Seistan and Khorassan has to some extent become fashionable among travellers who seek interest outside the beaten track of a winter tour in the Middle East. But though the route has more than once been described, few of the Europeans who have passed along it have seen more of the neighbouring country than can be viewed from the actual track.

In the course of the past twenty years participation in various official survey expeditions has afforded me an opportunity of gaining a more extended acquaintance with this region. It has been my lot to traverse in all directions and to see under all conditions, in storm and sunshine, in terrific heat and biting cold, this country where three

empires meet, fascinating in many ways in spite of its drawbacks, with its varied physical characteristics, its quaint legends, its stories of fierce hatreds and unbridled passion, and, in Seistan, its traces of former greatness, suggesting dreams of revived prosperity in a happier future.

Lord Curzon, in his monumental work on Persia, has referred to Seistan as a region "where a political crisis is always possible and sometimes acute, and where the Indian frontier question emerges as a formidable factor in the situation." The note of warning which Lord Curzon sounded was mainly designed to call attention to the extension of Russian influence southwards, and the attractions which Seistan might be supposed to offer to that power as a strategic base. In this connection the Persian problem has been materially modified by the Anglo-Russian Convention of August, 1907, wherein the south-eastern corner of Persia is recognised by Russia to be what, for want of a better phrase, may be termed a British sphere of influence; but the triple borderland embracing northern Baluchistan, southern Afghanistan, and parts of Eastern Persia, must always be of importance in relation to our Indian Empire.

It is not for me to undertake any discussion of the problems presented by this region in its political relations. But a description of the experiences of one whose duties have taken him off the beaten track of trade and travel, together with some account of the country and its people as revealed by those experiences, may not be uninteresting, and at the same time will, I would hope, form a useful

addition to the somewhat scanty published records of information about this corner of the Middle East.

There is no disguising the fact that where it traverses Baluchistan the trade route from Nushki passes through a most inhospitable and, in some respects, a hopeless country. Thanks to the improvements introduced by the Indian Government, the conditions to-day along the actual track are vastly better than they were even a comparatively few years ago. Only those who have crossed at the heels of a Baluch guide before the route was established, and who have undergone the routine of daily marches along an ill-defined trail, with no assurance that an adequate supply of water would be forthcoming at the end of the day's march, can appreciate fully the progress represented by the present facilities for the journey, or can realise properly the normal conditions of travel in the country.

Forbidding as the country is, however, it attracted the attention of the Indian Government at least a hundred years ago. The despatch of a mission to Persia in 1807 by Napoleon Buonaparte roused the authorities in Calcutta to take steps to counteract his designs in that direction. In 1808 Sir John Malcolm was appointed Special British Envoy to the Court of Fath Ali Shah, but before he could carry out his task he was recalled, and the mission postponed till the following year. At the end of 1809 Lord Minto, the Governor-General in India at that time, renewed Sir John Malcolm's instructions, and in 1810 the mission was duly carried out. For the purposes of this narrative the point of particular interest about the mission is that with it were associated efforts to increase our

knowledge of the countries between Persia and India and along the Persian Gulf. Selected officers were deputed to explore and report on the political and economic conditions of particular regions, Baluchistan and Khorassan being assigned to Captain Charles Christie and Lieutenant (afterwards Sir) Henry Pottinger.

Performing the journey, so long as it was possible to do so, in the guise of Mussulman pilgrims, Christie and Pottinger travelled in company from the coast region west of Karachi up to Kalat, and thence on to "Noshky." At Nushki the two officers separated on March 22nd, 1810. Christie made his way west and north to the Helmand, and, crossing the river, continued his march to Herat, where he turned west and journeyed to Yezd and Isfahan. At the last named place he was rejoined in June by Pottinger, who had passed south-west and west from Nushki, leaving Jālk on the north and visiting both Kirmān and Sheeraz.

Two-thirds of a century later two other British officers, Colonel C. M. MacGregor and Captain R. B. Lockwood, made their way from the coast northwards, and passed along the eastern side of the Māshkel Hāmun to near the eastern end of the Gaud-i-Zireh; then turning west they passed south of the lake bed to Shah-Godar, near the present meeting-place of the British, Persian, and Afghan frontiers. Both officers returned east to Jacobabad, but by different routes, Lockwood passing through Nushki, while MacGregor followed a more southerly route.

To this day worn scraps of paper, bearing in faded characters the handwriting of these two gallant officers,

are treasured as precious heirlooms in the families of their guides. Some fourteen or fifteen years after their journey [illegible] and Rochestad had visited [illegible] told me that he quoted [illegible] lowed and he obtained [illegible] of all well, and he spoke [illegible] self-control which the [illegible] would come then have [illegible] complaint to which he [illegible]

[illegible] influence on the side [illegible] it was not until after the [illegible] between Baluchistan and [illegible] when Major Sandeman [illegible] route was planned, and [illegible] established.

[illegible] country began in the winter [illegible] observing Khelat, which [illegible] found that the people [illegible] strength. Already [illegible] the new state of affairs [illegible] from the lips of those [illegible] the country before [illegible] put a stop to the [illegible] experience, I obtained [illegible] recollections of life that [illegible] were the days when [illegible] of Ghazni used to lead organised raiding parties to harry their neighbours in Eastern Persia; when Kharan was the centre of a brisk



THE GREAT CHAPAR KUH.

A stupendous outcrop of limestone overlooking the Trade Route, and the Plain of Dalbandin, to the South of Chāgai Fort.

are treasured as precious heirlooms in the families of their guides. Some fourteen or fifteen years after their journey I met the guide whose riding camel Lockwood had shared on the return journey. The man told me that he noticed after leaving Chāgai that Lockwood used to dismount constantly, and was evidently not at all well; and he spoke with admiration of the unfailing self-control which the Sahib displayed. No doubt Lockwood must then have been suffering from the deadly complaint to which he succumbed on his arrival in India.

Sandeman first extended British influence on the side of Baluchistan in 1884-5, but it was not until after the demarcation of the boundary between Baluchistan and Afghanistan in 1894-6 by Sir Henry (then Major) McMahon that the Nushki-Seistan trade route was planned, and effective control over the country established.

My acquaintance with the country began in the winter of 1886-7. In the latter year on entering Khārān, which lies to the south of the trade route, I found that the people had still faint traditions of Pottinger's journey. Already the old order had changed, but the new state of affairs had not been firmly established, and from the lips of those who had taken part in the politics of the country before Sir Robert Sandeman's intervention had put a stop to the state of lawlessness that had been in existence, I obtained a very graphic description of the conditions of life that had not long before prevailed. Those were the days when Azād Khan of Khārān and Sarfarāz Khan of Chāgai used to lead organised raiding parties to harry their neighbours in Eastern Persia; when Khārān was the centre of a brisk

trade in slaves, the unhappy captives taken in the raids being sold into bondage and taken to Kandahar; when the desert tracks were closed to all who had not purchased the good-will of the two great freebooting chieftains; and when the heads of the small tribes which dwelt in the country followed the lucrative and honourable profession of guides to the raiding parties, maintaining a far-reaching system of intelligence, by which they were kept informed of all matters which affected their profession or could make their services of greater value to their patrons.

The profession of a freebooter was one in which a man of long and honourable pedigree might engage. Petty theft was regarded as utterly vile. A few broken men, outcasts from their tribes, lurked in parts of the desert, and were not above pilfering from caravans, but otherwise there was nothing to be feared, except from attacks by organised bands of raiders on the war path. The meeting of two parties in the desert was always a matter for caution on either side. One or two persons from each party having laid aside their weapons, if on a peaceful errand, would advance, and after the long-drawn-out formula of Baluch greetings, state the reason of their presence, whence they came and whither they journeyed.

To the ordinary observer there are no striking differences in the scanty dress of the nomads by which it is possible to distinguish the people of one district from those of another. Yet such differences do exist, and in the days before British influence rendered the tracks of the desert far safer than the streets of London, it was very necessary to learn wherein the differences lay. By means of them it

was possible to know where a party of strangers had come from, and very often this decided the question whether they were likely to prove enemies or friends.

One thing to observe was the shape of the head-gear—the felt cap of Seistan, for example, being quite distinct from the fine pointed cap and blue turban of the Barech tribe of the Helmand and Shorāwak. At a well or spring the guide's duty was to examine the ground carefully for traces of previous visitors. Or on the march, where a trail crossed the path and revealed the presence of a party having traversed the former, it was useful to be able to locate the place or district to which those who left their traces belonged. This it was possible to do by the prints of the sandals worn by the members of the party. By the spoor of the camels it was plainly evident whether those animals had travelled under loads, or whether they had been ridden—whether, that is to say, the party was on a peaceful errand or on the war-path.

It was important to know these details in the old days, as on such knowledge not only one's comfort, but one's safety, very largely depended. Horrible stories were told over camp fires of revengeful murders in the balancing of blood feuds; and of the means adopted to render it unlikely that captives taken and enslaved should ever desire to return to their homes. In 1891 I saw two pillars of earth that were declared to contain the remains of two men who had been tied to stakes and entombed alive. These men had been the owners of a couple of exceedingly fine asses which were coveted by the chieftain of their tribe. The simplest way of satisfying desire was to take

possession of the animals, and this the chieftain did. But the owners of the animals had the audacity to resent his action. They watched their opportunity and made off with the asses, and being pursued and captured were made a stern warning to others of the rights of authority. It was argued, indeed, that the chief had been rather lenient with them, since just before the pillars were completed over their heads each of these misguided men, who had dared to assert their right to their own property, had been stunned by a blow from an axe handle.

Typical of the conditions that prevailed before British intervention is the story of Azād Khan of Khārān and Mir Sābik, the chief of the Rekis. Azād Khan had long coveted the palm groves of Māshkel owned by the Rekis. Mir Sābik, however, did not at all fall in with the views of his neighbour, and as he had on one occasion, when Azād Khan had been reduced to great straits, given him shelter and assistance, he had no grounds for suspecting to what lengths thwarted ambition would be likely to carry the Khārān chieftain.

Unsuspicious of evil, Mir Sābik pitched his tents at a spring a few miles to the east of Jālk, and there for a time took up his abode, with only the members of his family and a few of his household slaves. Azim Khan, the younger son of the Khārān Sardar, was informed of this, and raising a strong party of armed men determined to remove Mir Sābik. One night this party of desperadoes fell on their victims. A short conflict took place in which Sābik lost his life, and his family and surviving dependents, including the young son of the late



KUH-I-TAFTĀN (FROM NEAR LĀDIS).

A dormant volcano, the peaks of which attain to elevations of about 13,000 feet above sea level. This imposing landmark dominates the western portion of the desert of Baluchistan.

chief, were made prisoners. Not satisfied with the death of Mir Sābik, the victors had a grave dug on the following morning, and the little boy Shah Sulemān was made to kneel by the side of it, and there was shot by Jāmok the Luri, the favourite of Azim Khan.

The feud caused by this barbarous act desolated the Māshkel district, and closed all traffic in the western portion of the desert. Azād Khan, however, was too strong for his enemies, who, though numerous, lacked his energy and ability. The Khārān chieftain was, indeed, in many ways a very remarkable man. At the time of his death, in 1885, he was said to be a hundred and five years old. In his prime he had been possessed of enormous strength. Men said he could cause the bars of a new horse-shoe to meet by compressing them in one hand, or break it by drawing the bars asunder with both. At the time of his death, owing to the infirmities of age, he had to be lifted into the saddle when he rode abroad. Once in the saddle, however, he could still ride long distances, and was able to tire younger men without serious inconvenience to himself.

With Azād Khan passed away the last of the Baluch chieftains of the old school. During his long life he had seen many changes take place. In 1839 he had taken the part of the popular party who were opposed to the nominee whom we had placed on the throne of Kalat, and had led the forces of the malcontents which threatened Quetta in 1840. The Khārān men were present at Maiwand also, forty years later, and with the spoils of

that fight, and rifles stolen from Kandahar, Azād Khan was able to arm permanently about a hundred men who constituted, as it were, his standing army. In addition he could count on the loose hordes of brigands whom his qualities attracted round him whenever he took the war-path.

After the death of Azād Khan, Jāmok the Luri, who killed, as related above, the little son of Mir Sābik, played a part in another notable act of bloodshed. Like others of his tribe, he was a skilful worker in metal. His profession as an armourer had caused Azim Khan, the younger son of Azād, to enlist his services, and in course of time no one had such influence with his master as the amenable Jāmok. Now when Azād Khan died there were suspicions in some quarters that he had been removed by his eldest son, the present chief, who thought his father had held the reins of authority long enough. However this may have been, Azād's possessions were duly divided between his eldest son and Azim Khan, the former dwelling in the new fort in Khārān, and the latter in the picturesque mountain stronghold of Jālwar.

As might be surmised from his raid against Mir Sābik, Azim Khan was a firebrand. He resembled his father no less in his ambitious nature than in his physical strength and courage, and it is, perhaps, not surprising that he was regarded with suspicion by his elder brother, who at last became possessed with the idea that Azim Khan was plotting his overthrow and intended to seize the Khanate. His suspicions, which appear to have had some basis in

fact, led the elder brother in turn to seek the death of Azim Khan. But Azim Khan was not an easy man to get rid of. He was of great stature, and his courage and great bodily strength rendered his removal a most dangerous undertaking. It was necessary to have recourse to treachery and to find the traitor. After some time Jāmok was approached, and in the end he was suborned to make away with his patron.

The plains outside the gorge in which the fortress of Jālwar is situated abound in gazelle, and the ground being open and also sandy, the method of hunting them is to approach on a riding camel and circle round the animals until the hunter arrives within range. Azim Khan was passionately devoted to this sport, the more so as time went on, and the growing influence of the British Government made it more and more dangerous to murder people openly. One day he and Jāmok (who always used to accompany him) sallied out of Jālwar on one of these hunting expeditions. Jāmok never returned, but later on Azim Khan made his way back wounded to death. The tale that was told was to the effect that as soon as the two men had reached the open country and found themselves alone, Jāmok let his patron get a little way in front and then shot him in the back, afterwards taking to flight. Khārān, of course, was no place for him, and, in 1890, he was said to be living in Sind or Las Bela.

The guides who led the raiding parties in the old days were useful persons to the travellers who explored the desert. Secure as they were in the support of one or other of the leading chiefs, he would have been a bold

or very reckless person who meddled with a party led by one of these men. In 1890, when journeying towards the Kuh-i-Safed, I had two local celebrities in the camp. One was known as "Ali with the Scar," from a sabre cut that traversed his countenance diagonally from the right eyebrow downwards; the other was Shah Sawār. Men said the success of the expedition was assured when the services of these gentlemen had been enlisted. One night two camels had strayed, and the Baluch camelmen (natives of the country near Quetta) made up their minds that the animals must have been stolen. Ali with the Scar and Shah Sawār looked at one another, and a faint smile flickered over their weather-beaten countenances. The idea of any misguided person stealing camels from a party which included them in it was most amusing. "Go to sleep," said they, "to-morrow the animals will be found. They cannot have been stolen." Next morning the animals were found a little way off; the camelmen had only been too frightened to leave the immediate vicinity of the camp to look for them.

Another of these guides, Ido the Mamasseni, is now a subordinate official in the Border Levies, and has turned his knowledge of the country and the formidable reputation he acquired in the past to a more reputable use, none being more zealous in the cause of peace and good government.

But striking as is the change wrought in the conditions by British rule, the influence of the old lawless times still survives in many of the present customs. To this day no Baluch or Brahui camp is ever placed close to



LURI MUSICIANS.

Luris are the gypsies of Western Baluchistan. They combine a knowledge of working in iron and other metals, of surgery in some cases, with music, and less reputable means of livelihood.

springs or wells. The tents are pitched in secluded spots among any neighbouring dunes or hills, and every day the women fetch water in water-skins carried on long strings of donkeys or bullocks. The tents are not pitched alongside the wells, because those are always the spots for which strangers make—and in the old days a stranger was more likely than not to be an enemy.

The people used to live in a constant state of alarm. Often their encampments were disturbed by news brought in by the outlying scouts of an enemy's presence. Then the flocks would be hurriedly driven in, and while the women packed up the effects of their household, and loaded the animals preparatory to retreat, the men armed themselves and took up positions suitable for defence. The women also at times had to take up the arms which a wounded husband or kinsmen could no longer bear, and take their places in the fighting line.

In these more peaceful times the amusements of the nomads are few. Stories told round the camp fire provide their principal recreation, and some of the folk-lore tales are of no small interest to the student of ethnology. In this direction lies a wide field of research which at present is almost entirely unexplored.

Many of these tales are connected with personages who are regarded and worshipped as saints, in whose honour shrines have been erected, which are largely resorted to by those suffering from adversity or sickness. One curious tale which circulates in the country round Chāgai bears a strong resemblance to our legend of St. George.

Once upon a time, men say, there existed a green

dragon, whose lair was situated in the forbidding tract of hills to the north-west of Chāgai, not far from the Lijji spring. This creature was the scourge of the surrounding country, as it preyed on human beings and demanded victims every day to satisfy its insatiable appetite. Driven to despair the inhabitants had recourse to a certain recluse famed for his piety, and prayed him to deliver them from this scourge. The holy man undertook the task, and with Divine assistance, but after a severe conflict, he overcame and slew the dragon.

This saint is styled Balanosh, or the "Remover of the Calamity." A shrine dedicated to him is situated within a narrow and gloomy valley, and the size of the shrine, and the vast accumulation of *ex-voto* offerings, testify to the value set by the people on his assistance in all times of stress. A narrow fissure in the hills beyond the Lijji spring is pointed out still as the site of the dragon's lair. Formerly, the story goes, it was much larger, but after the monster had been destroyed Balanosh caused the accursed spot to be closed and well-nigh obliterated. All around the forbidding appearance of the valleys, and the frowning cliffs of splintered rocks that overlook the waterless ravine, lend themselves to tales of horror, and the wonder is that more are not in circulation.

## CHAPTER II.

### EARLY EXPERIENCES.

Early Experiences—Defile of the Lorā and Shorāwak—Salt deposit in Māshkel Hāmun—Compared with that at the head of the Ran of Cutch—Legend of Pir Sultān—Visit Khārān—The "Major," a general ulility man—Slave deserter—Ido, Mamasseni, and his famous breed of greyhounds—Running down gazelles.

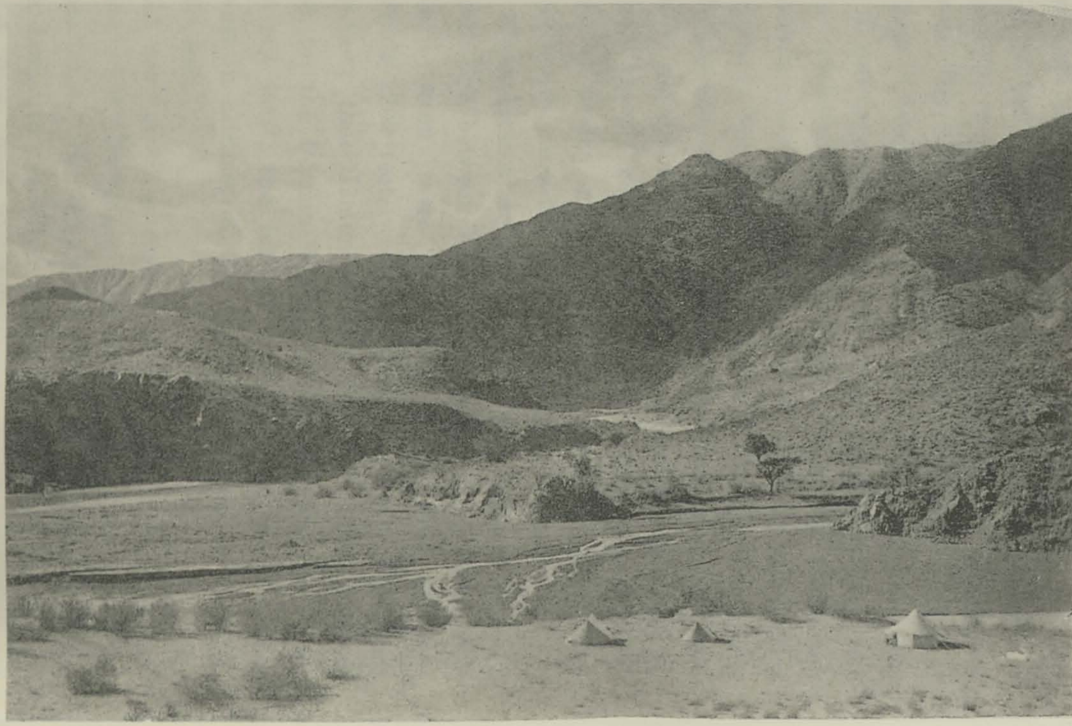
As already indicated, my acquaintance with the country which witnessed the scenes narrated in the last chapter began very shortly after the extension of British influence under Sir Robert Sandeman. Broadly, it may be described as a desert country, in the midst of which are situated a few pleasant places where water is abundant, where crops are raised, and where the verdure contrasts strongly with the inhospitable nature of the surrounding tracts.

The latter are not, however, invariably sandy wastes, nor as yet are they generally covered with sand dunes. These are confined to three well-defined localities, separated from one another by gravel-strewn steppes, where the polished and blackened surfaces of the disintegrated pebbles reflect the rays of the sun and dazzle the eyes of the wayfarer far more than does the sand. Among the dunes, also, growths of desert vegetation are met with which satisfy the needs of a traveller as to fuel and fodder for his camels. The gravelly terraces, on the

other hand, for considerable distances may be almost destitute of both.

It is not necessary for the purposes of the present narrative to discuss the geography of the country in detail, but it should be borne in mind that the desert tracts of northern Baluchistan occupy a small part only of a vast depression, more than four-fifths of which forms the catchment area of the great lake into which the Helmand River discharges its waters. In this huge depression begin that series of land-locked pans or basins which receive the drainage of the surrounding valleys, and which are such a feature in the geography not only of Persia but of Central Asia generally. Chief among these pans or basins in the particular depression now under consideration are the Ab-i-Istāda Lake, which is situated in Afghanistan at an elevation of 7000 feet, almost on a direct line between Kabul and Quetta, and about half way between those two places; the Lorā Hāmun, altitude 2700 feet, which lies just south of the Afghan frontier; the Hāmun of the Māshkel, altitude 1700 feet, on the Persian frontier of Baluchistan; and last, but not least, the famous Seistan Lake, which is the lowest in altitude of the four, lying at an elevation of 1600 feet.

At various times and on various expeditions it has fallen to my lot to see a good deal of the last three of these lakes. In 1886-7 some early survey work led me to the Lorā Hāmun down the valley of the Lorā River, which flows from the hill country north and west of Quetta. The head-waters of the river, after draining a



LORA DEFILE—MY CAMP BELOW THE NARROWS.

respectable area, unite close to the village of Burj, about twenty-five miles to the west of Quetta. Below this village the river has cut a deep valley through the hills, which fall for the most part sheer to the banks of the stream. Here, about a dozen miles below Burj, is the Lorā Defile. Great boulders crop up in the bed, and the river flows in alternate reaches of still, deep pools and shallow runs. At every few hundred yards precipitous spurs descend to the water's edge, and on this account it is necessary for the traveller frequently to cross the river.

During that winter (1886-7) I was camped below the narrows, and one day sent my camp some six or seven miles down stream, intending myself to follow later. After several hours on the hills, where I had been delayed by the successful stalk of a fine ibex, I and my men reached the river bank in the dusk of a winter's day. As there were no signs of our horses there was nothing to be done but to wade. Choosing those places where the water was most broken, as being shallow, I and my guide, a stalwart Afghan levy, entered the water, arm in arm, followed by my men. The loops were small, and no sooner were we out of the water than we had to enter it again a little lower down. It was the end of December, and already snow had fallen on the higher summits. The water was nearly waist-deep and icy cold, and after many crossings one of the men gave up and said it was impossible for him to go farther.

A fire was lit and a bivouac formed in a sheltered spot, and there we dried our garments and prepared to pass the

night. Before, however, we had settled down we were hailed by some one across the river. The country bore a very bad name and much caution was necessary, but as the shouts were repeated the voices were recognised as those of the Jamādar of the Levies. He had brought horses to take us into camp. We therefore mounted, and leaving the other men with some levies as an escort to follow in the morning, rode down stream to camp. The noteworthy fact is that altogether the river was forded no fewer than twenty-nine times in the course of a journey of only half-a-dozen miles.

Compared with the gloomy defile of the Lorā the district of Shorāwak, with its open fields and villages along the middle reaches of the river, was a most welcome relief. Soon after passing this district, where I stayed for some ten days, the Lorā breaks up into a multitude of shallow channels, which meander through a wide alluvial tract to the north and west of Nushki before they finally disappear in the Hāmun, to which the river gives its name. The Lorā Hāmun is situated on a curious plateau, the exact features of which it is impossible to study, as they are largely concealed by heavy accumulations of sand. The Hāmun is 600 feet higher than the Helmand at its eastern elbow.

In the winter of 1887, and again in 1889, I visited Khārān and the country around the Māshkel Hāmun. On the latter occasion, during the winter of 1889–90, the work extended to the Kuh-i-Safed, in Persian territory, and on the return journey to Khārān a route was taken which led the party round by the palm groves of Ladgasht



GORGE OF THE LORĀ RIVER. ABOVE SHORĀWAK.

and across the salt deposits at the eastern end of the Hāmun.

These deposits resemble very closely those at the northern end of the Ran of Cutch. The scene they present, as fixed in my memory, is a remarkable one. Imagine a sheet of glittering white stretching away from your feet into a shimmering, dancing mirage that commences a few yards away and which in its turn shades into the blue sky overhead. At a short distance a twig three or four inches long sticking out of the crust looks like a bush, and a collection of such twigs like a plantation fringing what look like clear blue pools and lakelets of water. A wandering gazelle crossing the line of vision is magnified at two hundred yards almost to the size of a camel, and at any range beyond is lost in the mirage; head, body and legs are distorted, and, separated as they appear to be from each other, move as if impelled by a supernatural volition.

The crust of the deposit is three or four inches in thickness and contains a very large proportion of salt. Caravans come from long distances to collect the salt, and elaborate formalities are observed in connection with the task, the whole tract being regarded as holy ground under the immediate protection of the Pir Sultān.

Pir Sultān Weis, to give him his full title, is a powerful saint after whom has been named the great volcanic mountain, Kuh-i-Sultān, which rises away to the north of the Māshkel Hāmun. The story told to me was that when the saint's life drew to a close the mountain opened with a burst of flame and engulfed the holy man. He is

believed still to ride through the hills during certain hours of the night on a chestnut horse, and a curious echo heard at times among the hills, which sounds like the distant, intermittent roar of big drums, and which both an officer of the Geological Survey and myself, occupying camps several miles apart, heard simultaneously in 1899, is commonly said to be his state music.

To this saint, then, the salt deposits of the Māshkel Hāmun have been dedicated. Altogether they extend over an area of several square miles, but the salt is mostly drawn from a plot about two hundred yards in diameter, which is regarded and most religiously respected as holy ground. Roughly in the centre of this plot is a small group of tiny puddles of brine resting in the inequalities of the crust, and a rude stake of Tagaz wood marks the Langar-i-Sultān, or shrine of Sultan. About a mile away is a larger ziarat, or shrine, where the caravans halt, and this also has the advantage of being "Bast," that is, a sanctuary—a most useful place in that country not so very long ago.

When a party of traders come to fetch salt they first perform their devotions at the shrine, and propitiate the saint with offerings, and then proceed to draw lots to see which of their number shall be privileged to enter the sacred area and collect the salt. The leader, or some other member of the party who is looked up to as being pious above his fellows, holds the twigs by which the choice is determined, Pir Sultān being supposed to guide the right (that is, the shortest) twig into the hands of the most fitting man for the duty to be performed. None

but this man may enter the reserved space. It is he who breaks up the salt crust into pieces, which are then piled into baskets, or are carried away in the cloaks of the favoured man's companions—though neither baskets nor cloaks can be brought inside the sacred area.

All the rules governing this procedure are very strictly observed, and on the journey on which the deposits first came under my notice, the death of two or three camels and a horse belonging to me, before we reached Khārān, was generally attributed to my having removed lumps of the deposit in an impious and unauthorised fashion.

By the time I reached Khārān, and from that place had journeyed to Kalat, the summer had set in. The change from the arid and blistered plains of Khārān, to the upland valley of Kalat, was most welcome. The fruit trees of the orchards were covered with masses of blossoms. In the fields, lucerne and cereals were sprouting, and the land was green with verdure, and gay with wild flowers. The air was delightfully cool and pure—a vast change from the dust-laden and parched atmosphere of the Khārān plains.

A queer character I met with on this journey (that of 1889-90) was the commandant of the so-called army maintained by the ruler of Khārān. He was also ex-officio bandmaster, the musicians being slave boys, who played their instruments in the intervals between other duties. This officer of many parts enjoyed the title of Major. He was, I found, a native of the United Provinces of India—and, I shrewdly suspect, a converted Hindu—one of the very few who saved their lives by abjuring their faith on

the battlefield of Maiwand. The Major was a very humble-minded person, and a present of a value equivalent at that time to about 10s. sterling sent him away quite happy when I wished him good-bye at Khārān.

I was half-way up the pass which led to the plateau, on my way to Kalat, when I was joined by one of the slave musicians, who had deserted from the Khārān "army." He had been followed by two or three men—several bands had been sent in all directions to capture him—and joined my caravan, imploring my protection, as he had heard that any slave entering the camp of a British officer was free at once. Knowing what the unfortunate wretch would have to face if taken back to Khārān, I refused to give him up to his pursuers, saying I would hand him over to the authorities at Quetta. This refugee had queer stories to tell of life in the desert and in Khārān, but as he was a hostile witness these needed to be largely discounted. Even if half of what he told was true, deeds were commonly committed of the blackest description. The lad was very anxious to visit India, and when I gave him a few rupees, as we were nearing Quetta, he took the hint and conveniently disappeared. I never saw him again.

This chapter of stray experiences would not be complete without reference to the fine strain of hunting-dogs bred by one or two notable characters in the Khārān country.

As a rule, game is far from plentiful. A Baluch or Afghan graveyard, or ziarat, is usually a very good guide as to the game that exists in the neighbourhood. Trophies of the chase are the usual *ex-voto* offerings at these places,

and are plentiful when game abounds. The ziarats in the desert are ominously free from such offerings. The people, moreover, are too inert and too poor to be keen hunters. Powder and lead originally were very costly and used to be reserved for serious occasions, so that in general there may be said to have been neither the opportunity nor the means for indulgence in sport.

Ido, the Mamasseni, the ex-guide, of whom mention has been made, is, however, a very keen sportsman. His position now-a-days as an officer in the Border Levies gives him the command of a certain supply of ammunition, but even in his unregenerate days he was famous as a mighty hunter, and his hounds possessed and still possess a very fine strain of blood, and are as celebrated as their master.

In 1899 I was met by Ido at Amir Chāh, as he wished to show me what his hounds could do. About sixteen miles to the west of Amir Chah there is an extent of gravel-strewn desert where gazelle are very plentiful, and thither Ido and I made our way with a ragamuffin dependent of the former leading the two hounds, one of which was a bitch. There was nothing in the appearance of the animals that was at all striking. Covered with tattered felt coats they slouched along with their tails between their legs, looking just an ordinary pair of dogs, if anything a trifle undersized, but with clean-cut limbs and muscles clearly visible under the fine skin. The close coat, which at a distance was barely visible, was a dark ashen grey, shading off inside the limbs and along the belly.

The method of hunting was very peculiar, and appeared to demonstrate the fact that, in addition to a very great turn of speed, the dogs had scent to enable them to follow the fresh slot of a deer. When we were close to Zeh, the slot of a buck gazelle crossed our path, which was pronounced to be only a few minutes old. The dogs were stripped, and Ido's ragged dependent led them away on the trail on leashes, one in either hand. When the tracks seemed to indicate that the gazelle was not far off, the dogs were slipped and, having made good the scent, roused the quarry.

In the meantime we pushed on, till on the outskirts of the plain of Zeh a halt was made on a low dune to await the chase. That was the only galloping ground, and Ido assured me the deer would head for it as soon as he found he could not shake the dogs off in the sand hills. Sure enough, shortly after we had taken up our position the chase came in sight. The gazelle, with its horns laid back on its neck, was racing for its life, with the two dogs level with its shoulders, the bitch on the near and the dog on the far side. As the three animals flashed past, about two hundred yards away, the dog made a feint at the buck, which swerved slightly to avoid it. In an instant the bitch had seized it, and deer and dogs were hidden in a cloud of dust on the plain. Before the deer could rise or struggle the dog also gripped it, and between them both the animal was pinned to the ground.

On our arrival the dogs were taken off. The deer was killed and rendered lawful food by its throat being cut. Coats were promptly put on the dogs and the latter were

allowed to lick the blood which had formed a little pool on the thirsty gravel. They could not have had more than the merest taste. When the caravan had overtaken us the dogs fell in at the rear of the camels, and it was almost impossible to recognise them as the same animals that had a short time previously run down a young full-grown buck gazelle.

Pieces of unleavened bread and a little skimmed milk with occasional bones composed the diet on which the hounds were kept, "For," said Ido, "if I fed them as you gentlemen do your dogs, mine would soon be fat and useless." He only kept a pair at a time. The litters he destroyed. He had a high opinion of his dogs, and any person to whom he gave a pup acquired no little prestige in the country, since the recipient of such a gift must obviously rank very high in Ido's estimation.

# CHAPTER III.

## ALONG THE AFGHAN FRONTIER.

The Afghan Border—Indo-Afghan Boundary Commission under Major A. H. McMahon—Experiences during progress of delimitation across the desert—The Mālak Dokand—Herds of wild asses at Saindak—Night March to the Shela—We lose our water—A trying experience—Extremes of temperatures at Gudar-i-Shah—A desert formed by a change in course of the Helmand—Brine pools, due to continuous evaporation—Comparison between the Shela and the Luni River in Western Rajputana — Kuh-i-Malik Siah — Neza-i-Sultān, one of Nature's curiosities—Famous spring, pools at Manzil—A desolate and repulsive spot.

As a result of the Durand Mission to Kabul in 1893, various boundary commissions were set to work to delimit what has come to be known as the Durand Line—the frontier between India and Afghanistan as defined in the agreement which Sir Mortimer Durand concluded with the Amir Abdur Rahman. To Sir Henry (then Captain A. H.) McMahon was entrusted the task of surveying and demarcating, jointly with an Afghan Commission, the southern section of the frontier, stretching from Domandi, a village on the Gomal River due west of Dera Ismail Khan, westwards to the Malik Siah Kuh, the southern limit of the Perso-Afghan frontier. The length of the boundary to be fixed was something like eight hundred miles, and the work occupied altogether more than a couple of years, from April, 1894, to May, 1896.

The Commission was of an imposing character. During the first portion of the time Sir Henry McMahon was accompanied by Captain R. J. Mackenzie, R.E., as survey officer, and four other British officers acting in various capacities. A military escort numbered a hundred and fifty infantry and sixty cavalry, and the total British following, including contingents from friendly tribes, amounted to little if anything short of a thousand men and six hundred camels, horses, and ponies. On his side, the Afghan Commissioner, Sardar Gul Mahommad Khan, a near relative of the Amir, enjoyed the support of an equally numerous following.

Between April, 1894, and June, 1895, the demarcation of the frontier was carried from Domandi to Ghwazha, a distance of about three hundred and sixty miles. The traverse of the desert country further to the west, always an arduous and dangerous task, offered peculiar difficulties during the summer months, and, accordingly, operations were suspended for a time, and the members of the British party returned to India. Many changes in the staff had taken place when the Commission reassembled in January, 1896. Sir Henry McMahon was still in command, but most of the other officers were required elsewhere, and to me fell the duty of replacing Captain Mackenzie as survey officer. When work was resumed the British following numbered about six hundred and fifty men, with seven hundred and fifty camels and a hundred horses, the large number of camels being due to the desert character of much of the country waiting to be surveyed. The Afghan Commission was as large as before.

From Shorāwak, the open district along the middle reaches of the Lorā River, which I had first visited in the winter of 1886-7, part of the British Commission ascended the plateau to a small village named Iltāz Karez. On this plateau the cold was extreme—greater than we experienced during any other portion of the work. Soda water not only froze hard as soon as the bottle was opened, but it also froze inside the bottle.

After a brief sojourn at the Iltāz Karez, we descended to the warmer tract at the foot of the plateau, and here our camp was reformed, close to a settlement belonging to a Shorāwak, named Saiad Bus. At this time, owing to the rain which had fallen just before we left Quetta, there was water in the shallow beds of the Lorā, forming pools which were the resort of large numbers of wild fowl. The hollows among the western sand hills also in many cases held water, and one of these, an irregularly shaped depression, formed a pretty lakelet with indented shores and islets covered with tamarisk bushes. The foliage and stems of the bushes had been cleansed of the dust and sand by which they are usually disfigured, and looked delightfully fresh by contrast with the surrounding sand hills. Small flocks of gadwall also enlivened the scene, either resting on the surface of the water or circling round the miniature bays, in whose calm surface every detail of their flight was clearly mirrored.

After Sir Henry McMahon had received from the Afghans possession of the Fort of Chāgai, on the western



ILTĀZ KAREZ.

shores of the Lorā Hāmun, the Mission followed the southern of the two ancient routes which led from Nushki to the Helmand. One night during the march, camp was pitched at a spot called Duganān, where a plentiful supply of brackish water made its way out of an extensive and lofty bank of saline earth. This bank was clothed with a luxuriant growth of kirt grass, and the camps of the British and Afghan Commissioners were placed among the tussocks of the grass, which at that time of the year was in a highly flammable condition. Just as every one had retired to their tents to dress for dinner an alarm of fire was raised, and the crackling of the ignited grass, clouds of acrid smoke, and tongues of flame, speeding like snakes from tussock to tussock, very soon revealed the extent of the danger.

The stores of the Mission and the tents of the camp appeared to lie directly in the path of the fire. No supplies and no tents had been despatched in advance, and, as our base at that time was Quetta, from where all supplies had to be drawn, even the partial destruction of our stores would have been a catastrophe. Happily the slight wind that had prevailed during the day had been succeeded by a calm evening. Every man turned out to oppose the progress of the flames, and our efforts were seconded very opportunely by a light breeze which sprang up from a quarter nearly opposite to that from which the wind had been blowing intermittently during the day. In the end the course of the flames was deflected, and the fire passed our camp and burnt itself out in the moist ground at the source of the spring.

From Duganān to Rabāt, at the foot of the Mālak Dokand Peak, the Mission pursued its course without anything to break the even current of its existence. After a very painful march along the dry bed of a mountain torrent we emerged in a small upland valley known by the name of Bahrām Chāh, where we enjoyed a brief but welcome respite from the heat that by this time (towards the end of March) was becoming unpleasant on the lower ground. Thence our route led by the foot of the Samuli peak, a mass of naked porphyritic rocks which is dwarfed, however, by the superior elevation of Mālak Dokand. The latter mountain shows with great effect. It towers high without a rival, and its severe outline forms a conspicuous landmark that can be recognised with the naked eye at a distance of fully a hundred miles. At its foot the Mission was encamped for several days.

At some time in the remote past someone had established at Rabāt a post, to which the place owes its name—a name originally applied by the Arabs to outposts on the frontier of the infidel races, and later on to the posts and "sarais" along the trade routes. This particular Rabāt at the foot of Mālak Dokand is famous for a most excellent water supply. There is a deep stream-bed, which is generally dry; but in place of flowing water the subsoil water from a very considerable catchment area collects above an outcrop of travertine which acts like a dam. When the subsoil water is plentiful it makes its appearance in the bed of the stream and forms a small meadow, the lush green colour of the sedges



THE SPHINX ROCK AT DUGANĀN.

and coarse grasses that thrive in the damp soil appearing all the more beautiful in contrast with the drifts of desert sand which fall into the stream bed, and which for some considerable distance conceal the steep banks.

At places the height of the banks is as much as fifty feet, and one night I had a narrow escape from a nasty accident. After having been out on the hills all day I started late in the evening for the camp at Rabāt. Delayed by rain showers and dust storms, I reached, as I thought, the Mission camp, at that time of night a blaze of fires and light. Urging my camel, which seemed dazzled by the light ahead and loth to go on, I was surprised and nearly thrown by the animal baulking and swinging round almost at the same time. As it was impossible to see anything the only course left for me was to make the camel kneel, and then to dismount and shout for a lantern. When it arrived it was a matter of some difficulty to find a way down the bank, until a convenient sand drift allowed of a slide down the steep slope of the loose material. Next morning I saw the place where the camel had swerved, and it was not more than six feet from the edge of the bank.

While we were encamped at Rabāt no one could escape from the dominating presence of Mālak Dokand. The mountain consists of a vast wedge of porphyry, the strike of which is from north-east to south-west. Instead of forming a hatchet edge, it is slightly hollowed in the centre, the summit, in profile, resembling a crescent. Four thousand feet of naked rock rise in a sheer precipice

above Rabāt ground level. Fissureless, chasmless—only a few gentle mouldings break the even surface of the wedge. Nowhere has any wind-borne deposit found a resting-place and allowed vegetation to spring up. The pale colour of the naked rock contrasts strongly with the darker hue of the strata that form the hills among which it stands pre-eminent. These hills are not more than two hundred feet above ground level, and they form a most effective foil to the sheer outlines and vast size of Mālak Dokand. As long as it is visible, no matter at what great distance away, it rivets the attention, and detracts from the other mountains that form the backbone of the watershed. Some of the summits of the latter, such as Mālak Naro, rise actually to a slightly greater height than Dokand, but none can vie with it in the effect of colossal size which its appearance produces.

The travertine obtainable at Rabāt from the outcrop in the bed of the stream is famed throughout the country. A very beautiful pale sea-green variety, highly translucent, is the best of all. The Baluchis use it largely for decorating the graves of their dead. It is used by them in the rough, but in Seistan fragments of inscribed tablets were frequently discovered the material of which must have come from Rabāt.

The rainfall during the winter of 1895–6 had been scanty—much below the normal for the winter season. As far, however, as Rabāt the camps of the British Commissioner and the Afghan representative had been able to march and halt side by side, and no inconvenience worthy of mention had been experienced on the score of water.



A BALUCH GRAVE ADORNED WITH TRANSLUCENT TRAVERTINE.

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Beyond Rabāt it was no longer possible to continue the joint march without greatly reducing the strength of the retinues. Further to the west it would be necessary to carry water for the use both of men and animals. Only the strongest of our transport animals could be depended on for the journey, and even these needed a rest. Accordingly as Rabāt was a place where water was plentiful and forage not very scarce, and as it was along the line of frontier, a fairly long halt was made there, while a special party was organised to continue the line of frontier to its termination in the Kuh-i-Malik Siah.

When all was ready a start was made with a party of about a hundred and fifty men and two hundred camels on the British side, while a party of about half the size attended the Afghan Commissioner. With Sir Henry McMahon were Captain (now Colonel) Maynard, I.M.S., the medical officer and naturalist of the Mission, and myself.

The task was to trace the boundary line for a distance of nearly two hundred miles through some of the most desert country imaginable. The worst part of the work was beyond Amir Chāh. From that point onwards the Mission followed a very badly-marked trail which had never before been trodden by Europeans, and was scarcely known even to the guides. Water was obtainable in a very few places separated by long stretches of desert. Where it did exist it was fairly plentiful, though the quality was indifferent. Between whiles it had to be carried for all our saddle animals as well as for our own use. Camels which carry loads and travel at a walk can, at a push, go

without water for some time; but riding camels which travel rapidly need to be watered frequently, and in this respect are little better than horses.

After leading us across the sand hills to the west of Amir Chāh, across the waterless plains of Zeh, under the rocky hills of Drānakuh, and over the wide slopes beyond, the faint trail brought us eventually to the spring of Saindak, which at that time was the haunt of herds of wild asses. Of these we soon had evidence. We had had a long night march, and after breakfast were all enjoying a well-earned sleep when we were aroused by a clatter of hoofs, which made us fear for a moment that our animals had broken loose. To our relief we found that the noise was made by a herd of wild asses which had come to drink at the spring, and finding our camp in possession of the water had been seized with panic. One animal which had become involved among the tents, was responsible for most of the disturbance, stumbling over ropes and pegs and making a great clatter in its headlong flight.

The next day I was in a detached camp beyond the hills, and very early the following morning another great mob of wild asses roused my camp by the noise they made galloping over the boulders. They swept past towards the sand hills almost hidden in a cloud of dust, and their noisy progress could be traced long after they had passed out of sight. The troop must have numbered fully a hundred.

From Saindak the Mission proceeded to Kirtākāh, a spring at the foot of the hills, whence a magnificent view was obtainable to the north. The ground descended very rapidly for about a dozen miles towards a great mass of

sand dunes. Beyond these again stretched a sandy plateau, ending in a low but decided cliff overlooking the vast depression known as the Gaud-i-Zirẹh. In the western pocket could be plainly seen an expanse of water, which must have been the remains of the supply which had flowed over from the Seistan Lake by way of the connecting channel of the Shela, on the occasion of the last great flood in 1885, supplemented by smaller flood supplies received in 1891-2.

The sloping ground immediately in front of the spring appeared to be an extensive plain easily traversable in every direction, the beds of the streams that have ploughed a net-work of channels across it and the boulders strewn by the water being alike hidden from view. The steep slope caused a peculiar optical illusion, for as we looked down the country beyond appeared to be inclined towards us. Through this country passed the straight line of the boundary, and we were soon to become only too familiar with it.

From Kirtākāh the camp was moved to a well at the foot of one of the peaks of the Kacha Kuh, in the bed of a stream that forces its way through a succession of defiles. Here was discovered a small community of Baluch shepherds, who were enlisted as guides.

At the request of Sir Henry McMahon I proceeded in advance of the others to the Shela, leaving camp after dark one night accompanied by a few followers. There was no moon, and out in the open a gale was raging which we had not felt in our sheltered camp. It was the one hundred and twenty days wind of Seistan, or a forerunner

of it; only at that time we were unable to recognise it as such. Afterwards some of us were destined to know it better. It was impossible to keep lanterns alight, and after one or two narrow escapes from heavy falls everyone dismounted, for neither our animals nor ourselves were able to see the ground ahead, owing to the darkness and the sand which the head-wind blew into our faces.

Overhead the sky was clear, and our guide directed his course by the Pole Star, while we followed him as best we could. On foot, and leading our unwilling animals in the teeth of the gale, our progress was slow. Sometimes we fell over boulders, and at other times into the water courses, which fortunately were not very deep. Within these the going was smooth, and we kept to them until the channels deflected too much from our course. Then with reluctance we climbed out and resumed our painful course over the boulder-strewn slope.

Early in the journey we met with a great misfortune. The camel which carried the water-skins stumbled and fell, the skins burst, and practically all the water was lost. As the dawn broke we pushed on more rapidly, and the further we descended the less stony was our path. But notwithstanding all our efforts, when the sun rose we were still some two miles short of the sand dunes. In addition to the causes of delay presented by the bad going, it had been imperatively necessary for us to make frequent halts to close up our party, in the endeavour to prevent anyone from straying. Even so we had not been successful. Owing to the noise of the wind it was impossible to make oneself heard at any distance over a yard, and after mid-

night two of our number were missing. When it was light enough to take stock of our company, we found that the missing men were two Afghan lads, both camel men. We could only hope they had been able to get back to the hills, and would find water.

The sand dunes, when we got to them, proved to be of the worst description, lofty piles of loose material into which both men and animals sank deeply. After making an attempt to cross them we were forced to retrace our footsteps and try again about six miles further to the west, where the dunes were not so formidable in size nor so plentiful. Between nine and ten o'clock we reached this spot and made a short halt, finishing the little water we had kept as a reserve in our bottles. On restarting we found it just possible to get on by dodging the larger sand hills, but progress was very slow. By this time the guide was suffering badly from thirst, and we had a great deal of trouble to prevent his leaving us and straying after illusive mirage effects in search of water.

After three or four hours of this work we left the sands behind, and then had before us only the gravel-covered plateau which we did not take long to cross. Having descended the cliff we found ourselves on an alluvial plain, covered with withered alkali bush, and shortly afterwards entered a tamarisk-studded belt. A dark line of vegetation on ahead marked the position of the Shela, and on our right front we saw what had all the appearance of cliffs.

We had feared at first that perhaps we might have overshot our mark and passed the Shela where it was

buried in sand, and as soon as the sand hills had been traversed, I had mounted my mare and cantered on towards the tamarisk thickets. Riding through these I found myself not far from a bend in the ancient river-bed. On either hand, for a long way, it was dry and partially choked with sand and stacks of dry tamarisk, but when I rode up to the edge of the high bank, a sheet of water some hundred yards long and about twenty yards wide became visible. The water was of a beautiful translucent green colour, darkening into purple in the depths, and as the wind ruffled the surface the tiny wavelets broke with a gentle splash on the clean sandy margin. At the upper end there was a small patch of freshly-sprouting reeds, the vivid freshness of which was very grateful to the eye after the glare and heat of the day.

The others were soon assembled on the bank, and a way was quickly found to the margin of the pool. The water proved to be little better than brine, but by scooping shallow holes in the sand along the water's edge, we obtained a fairly good supply. At any rate, we were not disposed to be fastidious. Men and animals quenched their thirst, and the latter were then turned loose to graze in the reeds, while we sat ourselves down in the shadow cast by the steep and high bank and rested after our exertions.

To the west could be seen the goal which we had been striving to reach—the Kuh-i-Malik Siah—its outlines clearly visible against the western sky. Up to that time, owing to the accident which deprived us of our stock of water, none of us had cared to taste any food; but in

the shade of the bank, after we had satisfied our thirst, we broke our fast, and loitered in the welcome protection afforded from the sun, watching the shadows gradually creep across the pool and then slowly advance up the sandy margin of the opposite bank, until at last they reached the belt of tamarisk beyond. Then we caught our animals, and ascending the bank followed the bed of the Shela towards the east until we joined the rest of the Mission party.

It was getting on towards the middle of April, and during the march in the early part of the day the fierce, dry heat had seemed to drain our bodies of moisture, causing a raging thirst which might have become serious had we been obliged to go on for any length of time. None of us had more than a mouthful of water when we made our second attempt at crossing the sands, and although we were in no danger, the experience was not by any means one that any of us would have cared to repeat.

The two Afghan lads who had strayed from my party were discovered the next afternoon by the Commissioner's followers, who were crossing the desert by the right track. Senseless and exhausted, the poor fellows were found lying on a low mound, almost in a dying condition from want of water and exposure to the sun, and it was many days before they completely recovered.

It must not be thought, however, that the desert was like a furnace at all times, even at this season of the year. Although the maximum temperature in the shade rose to 115° and 116°, the nights were very pleasant, and once the sun had set the temperature fell rapidly, till in the

small hours of the morning a blanket became very welcome. The cool nights enabled us to defy the heat during the day, rendered the more trying though it was by sand storms that made it necessary to wear a hat even inside our tents.

We were very much struck with the signs of the country having been once inhabited. It was not until after our sojourn in Seistan some years later that the mystery was solved, when we obtained confirmation of the statement of the Baluchis that the Shela had been once the bed of the Helmand. At that time, not so very long ago, the present dismal expanse of the Gaud-i-Zireh was covered with water. Along the edges of the lake there were great beds of reeds, where tall swathes, surmounted by their graceful flowering plumes, formed a very different landscape to that which meets the eye at the present day. The banks of the Shela were inhabited; the land on either side was cultivated, and a numerous shepherd population must have spread themselves over the southern desert, within easy reach of the lake.

Traces of the former occupation were found in the objects we had mistaken (during the hours of greatest refraction) for cliffs, which we discovered to be really two mournful ruins, themselves built on two mounds which were the remains of yet more ancient buildings. In one of the ruins, where a single arch was standing, there was a shrine dedicated to Hazrat Ali (the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad), who was said to have crossed the Shela here. Hence the name Gudar-i-Shah, or the Saint's Ford. The vegetation at the "ford" was the same as that



BOUNDARY PILLAR 186, KUH-I-MALIK SIAH, 1896.

Major McMahon; Mr. G. P. Tate; Major Maynard, I.M.S.

along the Luni River in Western Rajputana, below the flourishing town of Jāsol, only here we did not have the nim trees that are such a feature in every village on the banks of the Luni. At Gudar-i-Shah the "pilu" or *Salvadora persica* was plentiful, this being the only place in Baluchistan in which it has been found. The alkali bush was in great profusion, but, parched by the sun and want of moisture in the soil, it contained barely any sap. Tamarisks, on the other hand, flourished exceedingly. The pools in the river bed were beautifully clear and pleasant to the sight, though, owing to the density of the brine, no living creature existed in the water. In the lower part of the Luni in Rajputana the same thing occurs. Fish are brought down by the floods, but as the water in the pools that are left turns into brine, the fish perish. The water that was still in the Gaud-i-Zireh in 1896 had also turned to brine, and by 1899 it had evaporated, and the gaud was one great expanse of salt desert.

The labours of the Mission of 1896 were brought to a close by assigning a position to the Kuh-i-Malik Siah, and selecting a site on it that would be suitable for the trijunction point of the boundaries between Afghanistan, Baluchistan and Persia. The final pillar, No. 186, was erected at the northern end of a ridge which overlooked the wide-spreading plain of Seistan, not far from the famous shrine of Malik-Siah Kuh. "Malik" means an angel, or sprite, less than a Pir in the celestial hierarchy, but reverenced by the Baluchis ; and probably denotes a pre-Islamic belief sanctioned by the animistic tendencies

of a corrupt form of the faith. The shrine of Malik-Siah Kuh, or the "Sprite of the Black Hills," is by the side of the present trade route from Nushki, not far from the customs post at Chah-i-Diwān (or Divān) the "Well of the Divs" (or Genii).

The view from the meeting-point of the three frontiers was one to be remembered. To the north there stretched away the hollow land of Seistan as far as the eye could see. Across the Shela a cemetery crowned a low rise on which some ruined mausolea were dimly visible. In the remote distance, lifting itself out of the Seistan lake area, the level outline of the Kuh-i-Khwāja hill was to be seen distinctly with the naked eye, its shape so like the outline of a modern warship that, as a powerful telescope was brought to bear on it, one almost expected to see the funnels and masts. Eighty-five miles intervened between us and that remarkable isolated hill. Beyond the Shela, for forty miles, the country was covered with vestiges of human occupation. Some of the party who were gazing on Seistan that afternoon were destined to become familiar with that desolate tract. I, indeed, was to enter it three years afterwards—though only for a short time—as well as in company with the subsequent Seistan Mission.

On our outward journey from Rabāt to the Kuh-i-Malik Siah no attempt had been made to examine any part of the country, owing to the imperative necessity of finishing the task of delimitation and of demarcation before any change in the weather which might have delayed the completion of the work. On our way back, however, we



AFGHANS PREPARING SULPHUR AT THE KUH-I-SULTĀN.

turned aside to devote a day to the examination of a very remarkable feature in the Kuh-i-Sultān Mountains, known far and wide as the Neza, or the "Iron-shod Staff of Pir Sultān." This landmark had been seen first by Sir Charles MacGregor and his travelling companion, Captain Lockwood, in 1877, and fifteen years subsequently I had sighted it from the heights above Jālk, very nearly a hundred miles to the south of the Sultān Group.

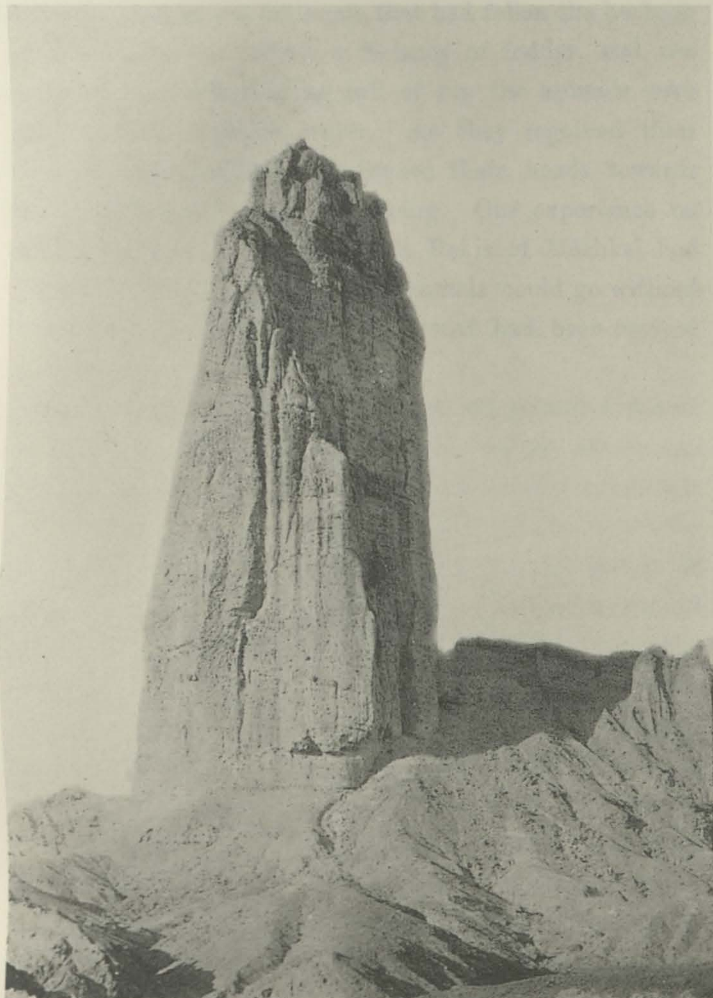
Amir Chāh was the nearest point from which we could visit the Neza, and on the afternoon following the night of our arrival at the wells we started on this side expedition. Our route lay up the stream which drained the westernmost of the ruined and weather-worn craters of which the Kuh-i-Sultān is composed. The head of this water-course drains a catchment area, the limits of which are formed by a series of remarkable cliffs and pinnacles of volcanic agglomerates, which in themselves are very striking natural features. Everything else is dwarfed, however, by the presence of a monolith of vast size. The cone that at one time enclosed the chimney of the volcano within which this great mass of agglomerates was cast has completely disappeared. The softer and more friable material has long since been eroded by the action of the elements, leaving the cast of the chimney almost unaffected by their ravages.

The Neza towers to a height of 670 feet above the low watershed, on the crest of which it rises as from a pedestal; the hills that form the watershed being, in their turn, about 250 feet higher than the floor of the ancient crater, which still forms a circular bowl pierced by the

stream up which we marched. In plan this giant's "staff" is roughly a right-angled triangle, the two sides facing west and south, while the base fronts the north-east. This last face of the Neza shows very clearly the effect of the action of the elements, being seamed with longitudinal fissures as if the material on that side had been less able to withstand the long-continued exposure to the climate. On the other two sides many of the included boulders have become loosened, and have fallen, leaving empty cavities which pit the surface of the rock.

After a very toilsome journey, lasting till near midnight, we reached a point about a mile from the Neza, and there we dined and formed our bivouac. It was a brilliant moon-lit night, and the shaft of the great mass of agglomerates standing out against the dark blue sky oppressed our minds by its towering height and vast dimensions. The description we had read of this stupendous natural column in Sir Charles MacGregor's book entirely failed to convey the impression we derived from our visit to the Neza, and it would have been a misfortune if we had not availed ourselves of the opportunity of seeing it. Our long and wearisome ride up the Gami Chāh Mullah and back to Amir Chāh was, we considered, amply recompensed by the sight we obtained of what is certainly one of Nature's curiosities.

On our return march towards Rabāt, where the bulk of the British party had been left, we retrieved almost every day one or more of the camels which had fallen by the way under their loads, and which we had been compelled to abandon—as we thought to perish. A little



NEZA-I-SULTĀN.

cairns by which we marched. In plan this giant's "cradle" is roughly a right-angled triangle, the two sides [illegible] while the base fronts the south-west. The [illegible] of the [illegible] shows very clearly [illegible]

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by the way under their [illegible], and which we had been compelled to abandon—as we thought to perish. A little

rest had enabled many of them to regain their feet and make for the nearest shrub which offered a few mouthfuls of food. Owing to a little rain that had fallen the herbage of the plains provided a sufficiency of fodder, and the twigs of the bushes being full of sap the animals were able to exist without water. As they regained their strength they instinctively turned their heads towards Rabāt, grazing as they went along. Our experience on this occasion bore out what the Rekis of Māshkel had told me of the periods for which camels could go without water when the herbage of the desert had been revived by rain.

Before we reached our destination we passed a day at the wells of Darband, which we had cleaned out on our outward journey. These wells provided us with a sufficient and good supply of water, which in the vicinity is not far from the surface. From this place I took advantage of the halt to pay a visit to a famous pool of water named Manzil, or "The Halting Place." The pool lies at the bottom of a narrow valley between two low ridges of rock, one covered with sand and the other partially covered. The pool is about a hundred yards long by about thirty in width, and would be as useful as it is curious if it was not quite the most filthy place that can possibly exist anywhere. For centuries—for thousands of years probably—it must have been the resort of travellers and of shepherds. The floor of the narrow valley is now a compost of ancient dung of sheep and goats, cattle and camels, to a depth of very many feet, and the bottom of the pool is of the same foul nature.

Altogether the spot is one of the most weirdly desolate and repulsive that can be imagined. In a country where desolation reigns supreme, I have seen only one place more depressing than the Pool of Manzil. The rocky hills, the drifts of sand, the absence of vegetation save for a ragged growth of tāgaz, the great bed of dung on which nothing whatever grows, the dull oily surface of the water, edged with yellow scum—these unite to form a scene on which no one who has gazed once can wish to look a second time. A few poverty-stricken shepherds, belonging to the Nārui tribe, haunt the margin of the pool. Each day in the forenoon, and again in the evening, their flocks come to drink at this place, and then for a short time the solitude that broods over the narrow valley is dispelled by the animated forms and cries of the animals and their attendants.

The Manzil valley is about half-a-mile long, and runs from east to west. As the traveller rides out at the western end he passes over a low col into a similar valley which is even more desolate and wild than that he has left. A thick crust of nitre clothes the bottom of the glen, and it is full of blighted tamarisk about five feet high. The leafless withered branches, and the stems from which the bark hangs in shreds, combine to form a landscape compared with which the scenery round the Manzil pool offers a cheerful and smiling prospect.

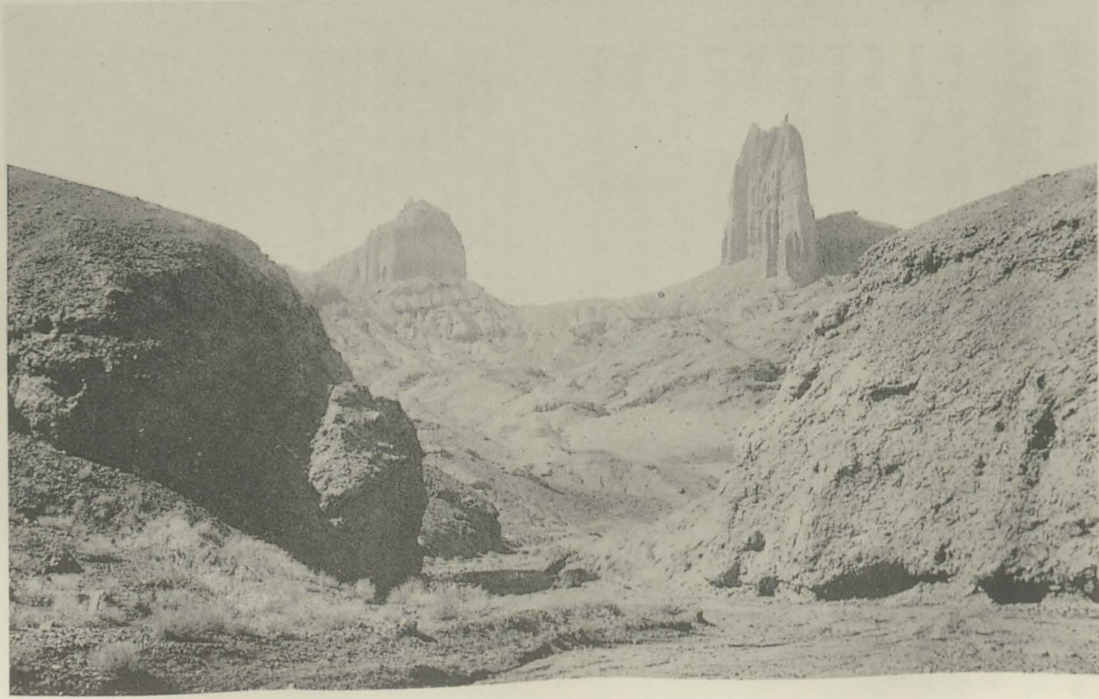
All around the country is regarded as within the area under the especial protection of the Pir Sultān, and this Saint is believed to have rendered innocuous all the snakes in the district. His influence prevents them, it is firmly

credited, from biting human beings, and if they do bite no ill effects need be feared. There are a good many snakes about, but they belong principally to that variety of the viper family known as the *Echis carinata*, the bite of which is by no means fatal in every case; and in this way we may perhaps account for the origin of one form of the legend about the Saint's influence over these reptiles. In Seistan, afterwards, we found that the bite of the *Echis carinata* was never followed by ill effects. There were two cases of snake-bite, in neither of which did the patients experience any real suffering, nor did any ill effects follow.

Other stories justifying the Saint's reputation are not lacking. On one of the low hills in the vicinity of the Pool of Manzil men point out an upright stone, which, they say, once upon a time was a man. Two impious wretches set out to steal some camels belonging to the Saint. Having arrived on the scene one of the thieves went out to reconnoitre the position of the camels, so as to lay his plans well for stealing them, while his comrade remained in the bivouac in order to cook the day's meal. The Saint, of course, knew all about these men and their nefarious designs. He frustrated them in a very simple way, by turning both thieves into stones—the first while on a hill he had ascended in order to locate the Saint's camels, and the other in the bivouac where he was engaged in preparing the meal. If any should doubt—are not the rocks still in existence, ready to be pointed out to all who may wish to have some evidence on the point?

Manzil, therefore, is a place which is in some degree a

sacred locality, notwithstanding its filth. A shrine dedicated to the Pir Sultān stands on a low knob overlooking the pool, but it is distinctly a poorly furnished shrine, and the only approach to the usual offerings are one or two goats' horns suspended on the straggling branches of a withered tāgaz tree. The air of poverty, however, that characterises the shrine is not due to any lack of reverence; it is merely typical of the country and its few inhabitants.



IN THE KUH-I-SULTĀN.

## CHAPTER IV.

### ON THE ROAD TO SEISTAN.

Return to Quetta, 1902—Accompany Colonel McMahon on a Second Boundary Delimitation—Leave Quetta—Extensive view from Kishingi overlooking Nushki—Recross old ground—Christie's Route in 1810—Webb-Ware, Pioneer of the Trade Route—Cross the desert in several parties—Experience severe weather at Arbu—Desert highway marked by graves of victims to thirst—Make the Helmand—Colonel Pollock and Dr. Bellew—The wind of Seistan, terrific gale and dust-storm—Experiences of march in the teeth of the gale—Māla Khān, ruined fort and tomb—Pattinson's Irregulars garrison it in 1842—Death of Pattinson—M. Ferrier in 1845—Khwāja Ali—Gazelles.

After the delimitation of the Afghan frontier, as described in the last chapter, I was again in Baluchistan in 1899, and at the same time managed to get a peep into Seistan. Then came an interlude of three years, during which I was stationed in China and Burma. The end of 1902, however, saw me once more back in Quetta, preparing to take up work as survey officer of the large and important mission which was being organised by Sir Henry (by that time Colonel) McMahon, for the purpose of laying down afresh the boundary between Persia and Afghanistan in the Seistan region.

The history of the dispute between Persia and Afghanistan as to the ownership of Seistan, is both long and complicated. At this date the trouble chiefly centred in questions relating to the division of the waters of the

Helmand between the two countries. Thirty years previously, in 1872, a British Commission, under General Sir Frederick Goldsmid, made as careful an examination of the country as was possible in not very favourable circumstances, and subsequently Sir Frederick Goldsmid delivered at Teheran an award, the effect of which was to divide Seistan between the two claimants. From Band-i-Seistan, a great weir not very far from the mouth of the Helmand, the boundary was defined as following the main channel of the river to the shores of the Seistan Lake, which was then traversed by the boundary so as to leave the northern portion of the lake to Afghanistan and the southern portion to Persia.

As usual in such cases, the award gave satisfaction to neither party. The boundary as defined by Sir Frederick Goldsmid was never properly demarcated, and it is easy to see how, when in 1896 the Helmand began to pour the bulk of its waters into the lake by a different channel from what had been the main bed in 1872, grumblings and disputations over the interpretation of the award began to assume a serious character. To cap all, in 1902, the Helmand ran nearly dry, and Persians and Afghans came almost to blows in their efforts to capture the scanty supply of water that descended the river-bed in September and October of that year.

Once more the British Government, at the request of Persia and Afghanistan, assumed the unthankful rôle of arbitrator, and to Sir Henry McMahon was entrusted the task of investigating the question of the water-supply and its use by the two countries, his instructions as regards

the boundary being to lay down a line that should conform as closely as possible in the altered circumstances to that defined in Sir Frederick Goldsmid's award. The fact that the execution of this task involved nearly two and a half years of field work on the part of a mission that included twelve British officers and comprised in all nearly fifteen hundred persons, affords some idea of the magnitude of the work.

It was on the 12th January, 1903, that I rode out of Quetta to Girdi Chah to join the camp of the Seistan Mission. There had been a slight fall of snow earlier, and there was every prospect of more to come. It was imperatively necessary to get away to the lower ground at Nushki before this fall took place. The weather was bitterly cold, and it was an unwelcome task to rise at 5 a.m. and face the piercing wind in order to allow of the baggage being loaded and despatched. Midway between the posts at Murād Khān and Kishingi the long-threatened downfall commenced; but we pushed on till we had got beyond it, and after a halt for lunch by the wayside reached Kishingi without difficulty. The Mission followed the trade route from Quetta to Nushki, and this was the last opportunity any of us had of doing so, for by the time we returned the railway to Nushki was almost completed.

Kishingi is on the last step, or ledge, of the plateau that overlooks the plains of Nushki, and as we reached the crest of the last descent into the low country a wide-spreading landscape was presented to our sight. Immediately opposite and close to us, providing an effective

foreground, were the steep cliffs and shoots of a massive bed of conglomerate, with rounded western spurs sloping gently down towards the villages of the plains. In the middle distance the yellow plains of Ahmadwāl and Nushki merged into lines of sand hills and low heights, beyond which again the wide plain of the Dhāk receded and was lost in the haze of the remote distance. The extensive prospect was closed by the great limestone mountains of Khārān. The massif of Sheikh Husen, the striking summits of the Chàkar Kohān, the imposing bulk of the Rās Kuh, and the precipitous Kambarān provided a background worthy of such an extensive landscape. Standing alone, and rising out of a blurred mass of insignificant ridges, the clear outline of the cone of Palchota was plainly visible, while above the western horizon appeared the distant summits of the Kuh-i-Chagai. It took many days for our camel trains to plod across the country which we thus embraced in a glance.

Our immediate destination was the new town of Nushki, which had sprung up within the three years that had passed since I returned from Seistan in 1899. What at that time had been a wide and stony plain was now covered with houses. At Nushki we experienced warmer weather, which was most acceptable after the snow and frost of the plateau; but the rise of temperature proved only a symptom of a change, and within a few hours of our departure from Nushki, on the 20th January, heavy rain surprised us on our way across the Dhāk to the camping ground at Zāru. The rain had one advantage, in that it softened the hard soil, which previously had been very

trying to both man and animals; but it was followed by storms of wind that raised great clouds of dust, and two or three days later there was a recurrence of wintry weather, as many as ten degrees of frost being registered on [illegible] temperature [illegible] nev[illegible] Yet on Christmas day a few day[illegible] had registered [illegible]

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[illegible] R. C. Bell and [illegible] at the peak of [illegible]



BRITISH AND AFGHAN CAMP AT THE KANI WELLS (1896).

[53]

trying to both man and animals; but it was followed by storms of wind that raised great clouds of dust, and two or three days later there was a recurrence of wintry weather, as many as ten degrees of frost being registered on January 24th, on which day the maximum temperature never rose above 49 degrees. Yet at Nushki, only a few days before, the thermometer had registered over 86° (Fahrenheit).

From Zāru to Kāni we were on ground which the Afghan Boundary Commission had traversed in 1896. On the present occasion we found that the wells at Kāni had fallen in, and but for our advanced party we should have fared ill for water. In this connection the cold weather was of the greatest assistance, as the transport animals were not thirsty and their small requirements were easily satisfied. On the other hand, the marches had to be made in the teeth of an icy wind from the north-west, which made travelling very painful. These conditions continued all the way across the desert.

Shortly after leaving Kāni the Mission struck Christie's route of 1810, and followed his line of march till it became necessary to break up into detachments in order to cross the worst of the desert country, which it was out of the question for so large a party to attempt to negotiate in one body. The first detachment to leave was a column under Webb-Ware, the Pioneer of the Trade Route. Three days afterwards a second column, under the command of Major Douglas and accompanied also by Captain R. C. Bell and myself separated from the main body at the pools of Salihān.

At this place there was quite a respectable population for a desert encampment, but the tents of the nomads, being placed in the bottom of shallow ravines, were not at all easy to find. One or two herds of undersized camels wandered over the plain, and one enterprising individual had even attempted to raise a small crop of barley. About half-a-dozen plots had been sown and the poor soil had been irrigated from the spring. When we arrived the barley was sprouting. Small as was the area and poor the crop, yet it made a most welcome break in the monotonous scene of desolation through which we had been travelling.

At an early hour of a boisterous and bitterly cold morning, we of the second column moved off in the direction of the Arbu peak, at the foot of which we were told that a small supply of water would be obtained. The stage, in ordinary circumstances, would have been easy, but in the teeth of a blizzard it became a severe trial of endurance. Even this extreme cold, however, was in some respects not without its advantages. Our water-skins, filled overnight at Salihān, had frozen solid by the morning, and only the contents of those skins which received the sun's warmth during the day were partially thawed by evening. Outside, icicles six inches in length formed a fringe along the seams. Those of us who were mounted pushed on in advance, for our only escape from the blizzard was the sheltered side of the hill for which the column was making. There, under the lee of the rocks, three very chilly persons spread their rugs and gradually thawed, the process being aided very materially by copious draughts of warm tea,

and by the lunch we had brought with us. We were fortunate also in discovering a bay in the rocks for our tents. The soil was composed of ancient camel dung, but owing to its age it had lost its offensive odour, and it proved most useful as fuel.

Everyone was up before daylight the next morning, as we were anxious to be moving on our way across the desert. Our water had again frozen hard, and there had been barely any demand on the supply at the camp. The animals, owing to the cold, showed hardly any signs of thirst. Pools of rain water which we found by the side of the track were solid masses of ice as late as nine o'clock in the morning. This, however, was an unusual state of affairs, for we also came across graves, sometimes singly and at other times in small groups, which marked the places where unfortunate wayfarers had succumbed to thirst. One of these memorials seemed doubly sad. Only a short distance from the well at which we had passed the night some person had sunk down and had died almost within sight of water.

About half-way across the desert we rested for the night in the wide bed of a stream which, rising in the southern hills, had ploughed a course through the terraces of the desert. The ravine was almost a quarter of a mile wide, and the bed composed of shingle. In this wadi there were signs of recent floods in the shape of a narrow ribbon of fresh soil meandering in loops within the bed of the stream.

Continuing our way across the terraces, every now and again descending to a slightly lower level, we arrived at

the principal scarp, down which a well-trodden path led us. At the foot the ground was cut up into shallow ravines, and we found two pools of rain-water which our animals showed no desire to touch owing to the cold. The cliffs and the ground at their base showed very clearly the effects of erosion. The exposed material of the lofty terraces from which we had descended was a pale red colour, streaked and flecked with bands of gypsum, the general effect being highly suggestive of a freshly-skinned carcase. Beyond the pools the track passed between two wind-shaped cones, and beyond these again we crossed a broad valley descending from the Khānishin hill, which lay to our left. Across this was the last terrace of the desert, overlooking the valley of the Helmand.

As we progressed on our journey the Khānishin hill had become more distinct. Streams also—or rather the channels in which streams sometimes flowed—were more numerous. To the right stretched the low ground over which the first column was marching, and though we could not see them they had seen our camel trains crossing the high terrace. Through the thick, dust-laden atmosphere there had been momentary glimpses from our caravan of the tamarisk trees growing in the low-lying alluvial tract of Bhakāt, and of the extensive area covered with sand hills farther away; but it was not until we had reached the line of cliffs which formed the last descent into the valley of the Helmand that the lands around the settlement of Muhammad Amin Khān were sighted.

In the waning light and through the dust rising before the wind it was just possible to recognise the outline of a fort, with the slender forms of two trees outside its walls. The land was clothed with the coarse kirt grass, looking more yellow than green, though round the settlement a flash of purer and more vivid colour indicated the presence of cultivated land, where young wheat or barley had already sprung up. To the left a low-lying spur of Khānishin closed the view, while away to the north could be seen the level outline of the waterless plateau beyond the Helmand valley. The position of the river, as it swung in a bold curve towards its final destination in the west, was suggested by the light glancing as from a naked sword blade where it caught the surface of the water.

Probably we were the first British officers who had looked on the Helmand so low down in its course since the days when Colonel Pollock and Dr. Bellew passed along it on their way to Seistan nearly thirty years before. Although we were properly alive to our privileges in this respect, yet after a long and very cold day, and after having been buffeted by an icy wind on the lofty terraces of the desert, what interested us more than anything else was the comforting sight of tents rising in quick succession behind the fort, which showed us that the first column had made the rendezvous and had taken up ground for the camp.

Riding through the kirt grass was slow work. Not only were the tussocks numerous and thick, but the soil had been very much torn by the wind, and it was im-

possible to travel rapidly over the broken surface. In other ways it very soon appeared that distance had lent enchantment to the view. The fort, which had stood out so boldly, we perceived, as we drew nearer, to be well-advanced in decay. There were great breaches in the curtain walls, while the flanking towers were riven, in some cases, almost to their foundations. The village was almost deserted. For the most part the houses were in bad repair, and only a very few families of Barech remained. The Baluch section of the population occupied temporary huts of tamarisk boughs and sheaves of grass, which they had put up for themselves at a little distance from the village, on the bank of the Helmand. Cultivation was almost entirely in the hands of the Barech, who carried on the work as the *métayers* of Amin Khān, the Popalzai landlord.

There can be no doubt that the Helmand River made a much bolder curve at this place in the past, and may have even flowed at the foot of the gravel-covered terrace to the south of the camp. The absence of ruins in this direction confirmed other evidence on this point, for the alluvial soil would surely have tempted human beings to settle on it if some drawback had not existed, and such drawback could only have been a fear of the river.

For a long distance above Landi Muhammad Amin Khān, where we had now arrived, the plateau to the north comes down close to the right bank of the river, whereas on the left extend the sandhills of the lower-lying desert. Below Landi Amin Khān, however, the "dasht" or plateau

over which we travelled from our camp at Arbu to the Helmand closes in on the river, which afterwards flows in a trough-like valley with cliffs on either hand. Owing to the absence of a plateau along the left bank higher up it cannot be assumed that the Helmand has worn out by erosion the trough in which it lies below Landi Amin Khān. It is noticeable, however, that the course of the river below Landi conforms to the outline of the great depression of the Gaud-i-Zireh, which lies to the south, and the theory suggests itself that the successive subsidences to which the Hollow of Zireh and the present delta and lake of the Helmand have been subject have resulted in a fracture of the plateau into which the Helmand has been drawn.

If such be the case, there ought to be traces of the old bed somewhere, unless the country to the east of Landi was a lake. It is possible that this supposed former bed of the Helmand may exist further to the north; but the country in that direction is almost entirely unknown, and owing to its inhospitable nature offers no inducements to anyone to enter it except for purposes of science.

Abreast of our camp at Landi Amin Khān the river flowed in three channels, separated by low but extensive islands on which flourished tamarisk and kirt grass. The main channel lies under the left bank, which is steep and about fifteen feet in height above the water. Here the Helmand forms long reaches of apparently deep water, with a smooth unbroken flow, separated by bars or shallows where the river rushes over the coarse shingle. This is the general character of the Helmand above its

delta, and the bars of shingle, or "kim," serve as fords when the river is not at a very high level.

For purposes of cultivation the land at Landi Amin Khān was irrigated by flood-water canals. The soil, we were told, is broken up and seed is sown in October. The fields are unprotected, and when the blades begin to sprout animals are allowed to graze on the tender shoots. By this novel procedure the people say that the crop is saved from destruction during the severe winter. The aftergrowth is also said to be more vigorous; the ear forms better and the quality of the grain is improved. Goats are not permitted to enter the fields, as they are said to pull up the plants by the roots owing to their manner of jerking the leaves when nibbling; but it is a common sight to see horses, cattle, and sheep grazing on the growing crop.

The change to the milder region of the Helmand was appreciated by all of us after the buffetings we had endured for many days previously. The morning of the 1st February was calm and bright, and the great landmarks of the desert were distinctly visible, the Khānishin hill appearing to be only two or three miles distant, instead of about fifteen miles, the actual distance. From a communicative Afghan we gleaned a good many facts regarding the climate and the prevailing winds. The south wind, called the wind of Khārān, was always warm, and in summer became a scorching blast. The east wind, known as the wind of Shorāwak, was also mild or hot according to the season. The north wind had no special designation, and it was always a cool or a cold wind,



ON THE HELMAND AT LANDI WALI MUHAMMAD. KUH-I-KHĀNISHIN IN THE DISTANCE.

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according to the time of the year. The west wind was the wind of Seistan, cold in winter, but warm in the summer; it brought with it clouds of dust, and ushered in a thick haze.

It was not long before we had an opportunity of verifying this last item of information. The wind that had set from the west gradually freshened as the day wore on, and though the sky was cloudless the air became chilly. There was an ominous darkening of the western horizon, and soon afterwards we were able to distinguish a great bank of dun-coloured haze advancing in our direction. The under portion of this bank shaded into a deep leaden hue. It heralded the approach of the wind of Seistan, laden with its burden of dust.

First one and then the other of the landmarks which had been so plainly visible in the morning were blotted out from view, and about five o'clock in the afternoon a few violent gusts of wind set everyone to see to the fastenings of his tent. By this time we had been obliged to put on heavier clothing. It had been arranged that an advance column should push on that evening, and a start was duly made; but it was with feelings of grave apprehension that we watched the long train of camels disappear into the gathering storm. By six p.m. we were involved in a hurricane. Darkness set in before it was due, owing to the clouds of dust in which we were enveloped. The upper canvas of our tents filled at every gust, and bellied and tore at the pegs to which the ropes were fastened, threatening every moment to leave us without a shelter. The shrieking of the wind drowned all other sounds, and

was varied only by the thrashing of loose ends of rope, or the flapping of some tent curtain which had become unfastened.

In addition to the discomfort due to the gale the cold was intense, and the scarcity of fuel was severely felt. After an early dinner the little party in our improvised mess-tent soon broke up, and each one sought refuge from the cold in bed. What with the noise of the wind and the straining of the tents, however, sleep was almost impossible. All night the gale raged, and the dust, blown in through every crack and crevice in the canvas, covered our persons and all our belongings. What must be the plight of our transport party we were afraid to think.

Had not the movements of the Mission been carefully pre-arranged, the votes of the whole party would have been given with one accord against proceeding on our journey on the following day. As it was, we had to adhere to our programme as closely as possible, and since Deshu, our next destination, was distant a long day's march, an early start was necessary. Fortunately with the arrival of morning there was a lull in the gale, and by eight o'clock we moved off in the teeth of the wind, which increased again as the hours passed on.

We had decided to follow the bridle path that led over the skirts of the Khānishin hill rather than the track along the river, as the latter would have involved several crossings not only of the Helmand but of the irrigation cuts as well. We did not seem, however, to have saved ourselves much labour.

The Khānishin hill is a ridge about two miles in length,

and in the course of ages drainage lines have developed and furrowed the skirts of the hill with deep ravines, separated from one another by narrow water-sheds like the bars of a gridiron. For the greater part of that day we were involved in the broken ground, the track crossing every feature in a most relentless manner at right angles. The skirt of "kim" was five to six miles wide, and though it ended in a well-defined cliff overlooking the river valley, with deep embrasure-like exits to the ravines, the ground was so broken that we saw next to nothing of the valley, beyond momentary glimpses of alternate stretches of kirt grass and tamarisk jungle, where occasional columns of smoke revealed the presence of human abodes.

Late in the afternoon we found ourselves at the mouth of a wider ravine than usual, and obtained a view of the valley through the exit of the stream. In front was a little block-house on a promontory overlooking a bend of the river. The river itself was just visible, with a dense growth of tamarisk fringing the opposite bank, above which we could dimly see through the haze the level outline of the plateau beyond. We passed the deserted block-house as the sun was sinking, while we had still some distance to travel before reaching our destination, but it was cheering to know that we should no longer be travelling over ground such as we had passed, since in front the track ran along the foot of the plateau to the south of the river.

There was little else to cheer us. The absence of inhabitants and the numerous cemeteries placed on the low

cliffs above the reach of floods combined to form a scene of desolation very different from what we had expected to find. Riding at a steady pace, we passed a promontory of the cliffs that projected to within a short distance of the river, and beyond this point the valley appeared to open out. To the right of the path there was an ancient cemetery containing the ruins of pretentious buildings—the tombs of people of distinction and wealth who, in days gone by, had probably been the owners of the soil and of the fort (now a great mass of ruins) which stood on an island in the Helmand further away. This was the ancient stronghold of Māla Khān, once upon a time an important position.

We were, however, more concerned just then about our advanced camp than with the scenery. We had found no traces whatever of the transport camels as we came along; nor, on our arrival at Deshu, could we gain any tidings of the missing party. Hurrying back to the river bank we decided to bivouac opposite the ruined fort, as here we could obtain fuel and our riding camels a mouthful of food from the alkali bushes on the plain. It was a cheerless spot and the cold was severe; and we were just debating whether we should not fare better if we took shelter within the ruined tombs when above the murmur of the water, as it rushed over a bar of shingle, were heard the faint sounds of camel bells. At once we forgot about the tombs. Much to the relief of us all, the transport train proved to be close at hand. Naturally there was much to inquire and much to see to. Already it was very late, and before the camp settled down after an unusually long and trying day it was well past midnight.

From the native officer in charge of the transport we learned that the little company had barely cleared Landi when it was caught by the gale. Men and animals struggled on for some time, but as they were making very little progress—for a laden camel offers a large surface to the wind, and a strong head-wind is as much a hindrance to the ship of the desert as it is to ships that sail the ocean—it was wisely decided to halt for the night. A fairly sheltered reach of a wadi was selected for the bivouac, and there the night was passed under conditions that may be judged from the fact that six camels died from the cold, while several others were rendered unfit to carry their loads.

The next morning broke comparatively calm. The sky was clear, and we were able to make a start in comfort. It was bitterly cold, but the absence of a strong wind rendered the low temperature bearable. By daylight we saw that we should have fared ill if we had resorted to the tombs for shelter. The walls were riven from top to bottom, and the *débris* of their domes, which had fallen in, formed a mound inside that would have proved ill-adapted for comfort. It would not, however, have been the first time that the tombs had sheltered human beings. M. Ferrier and his travelling companions in 1845 hid inside at night from the Mamasseni Baluchis, who had chased them all day from Khānishin along the Helmand, and since his time, if one might judge from the signs, the ruins had been occupied by other wayfarers.

Before leaving the neighbourhood we took a good look at the old fort of Māla Khān. The Helmand flowed

between us and this ancient stronghold, now in an advanced state of decay, and the water was both too cold and too deep to make it worth while to cross to the island on which the ruins stand. It was evident, however, that in days gone by the position occupied by the fort must have been one of considerable strategic importance. Not only did the fort command the valley for a considerable distance both above and below the island, but close at hand the valley was traversed by routes which led across the waterless tracts on either hand.

In 1842 a detachment of irregulars—levies we should call them now—was stationed under Lieutenant Pattinson at Māla Khān to keep the border country under surveillance. Sir Henry Rawlinson (then Major Rawlinson) was at that time in political charge of Kandahar, and that distinguished Orientalist had deputed Pattinson and Dr. Forbes to examine the valley of the Helmand and Seistan. Forbes, as we know, lost his life through his ill-placed reliance on the Sanjarāni chieftain, while Pattinson was shortly afterwards killed in the turmoils that followed on the untoward events in Kabul.

The march down the valley from Māla Khān was performed under much more favourable climatic conditions than we had previously experienced; and although the breeze freshened in the afternoon it never attained to its strength on the previous day. The path lay close to the foot of the plateau, with the river about a mile on our right hand, until we approached Khwāja Ali, where once more the valley began to narrow. The cliffs on the right

bank of the river were not broken by drainage, with the exception of a large stream which seemed to emerge from the plateau and join the river a little below Deshu. On the opposite side of the valley we found the cliffs pierced by several exits, which were the mouths of important and wide nullahs rising in the distant hills to the south and passing through the terraces of "kim" between the hills and the river.

On the way from Māla Khān we passed one or two Baluchi hamlets where the fields were green with the sprouting crops. The emaciated forms of the inhabitants showed how they had suffered from the famine that had prevailed in the previous year. Men, women and children were wandering along the edges of the fields, plucking the wild spinach and even blades of wheat and barley, which they ate on the spot.

As we continued our journey the tamarisk thickets that had first been confined to the bed of the river began to form a wide belt beyond its banks. Cultivation became less as we proceeded, and the soil was covered with a growth of camel thorn and alkali bush. Shortly before we reached our destination at the lower village of Khwāja Ali we fell in with a part of the transport animals belonging to the main body, which had followed the route of the Mission of 1885. This column struck the Helmand some distance above the village, and we learned from them the sufferings that they had undergone on the terrace of the desert plateau during the wind on the 2nd and 3rd. Two men, both Afghans, had died from the effects of exposure to the cold. The severe weather had told also

on the transport, and weakly and overworked animals succumbed to its effects very rapidly.

At the present day, so far as we were able to judge, the river to Khwāja Ali hugs the right hand side of the valley; but it is noteworthy that on the left side, which we were following, there were traces of old beds, which gained in prominence as we descended. In the vicinity of the lower hamlet of Khwāja Ali these ancient watercourses were used by the inhabitants for cultivation, and we found in them several fields of wheat and barley.

The tamarisk jungle at Khwāja Ali harboured a few black partridge, and some were shot by members of the Mission along the edges of the cultivated patches, as the jungle itself was too tall and too dense for shooting. On the river and an occasional back-water a few duck were picked up, but game was undoubtedly scarce, very much more so than we expected.

On the plateau to the north, the Dasht-i-Margo, the Baluchis told me that gazelle were plentiful, and that a few wild asses were also to be met with. It was, however, out of the question to make an expedition far into the waterless plateau for the purposes of sport, though at that time of the year it would have been perfectly easy to have moved about. After rain the Baluchis of the Helmand valley regularly move into the Dasht-i-Margo, and frequently are able to stay there until summer is at hand. Rain-water collects in the wind-scours and forms pools in ravines, and as grass springs up also in the springs these hardy nomads have everything they want both for their own support and for the sustenance of their flocks. The

plateau is therefore well known to them, and until summer has dried up the pools of rain-water it is an easy matter to traverse it in any direction.

There are two varieties of gazelle to be found in the desert. One is slightly smaller than the other, and closely resembles the Indian gazelle, or chinkāra. The other is a taller animal, and its horns are longer than those of the former. Instead also of the horns curving back and then slightly forward again, the horns of the larger variety curve inwards and are shaped like a lyre. Some of the heads of the large variety are very handsome, as the horns are longer than those of the smaller variety. Some fine heads are occasionally met with at the shrines dedicated to one or other of the Saints between whom the desert is partitioned, but they are very rare. The only chance of shooting game open to a Baluch who is armed with a matchlock is to wait over a pool of water on a bright moonlit night in the summer. In the circumstances it is not a matter of surprise that the trophies at the shrines are few !

## CHAPTER V.

### DOWN THE HELMAND.

Treeless Country—Mulberry trees introduced previous to 1839, Captain E. Conolly—Baluch hamlets and cattle shelters—Necessity for the latter—Representative escort of Afghan troops at Khwāja Ali—Osgood boat and raft of skins on the Helmand—Trough of the Helmand—Landi, or Colony, of the Barech Afghans.

We had earned a rest by the time we arrived at Khwāja Ali, and there we remained for five or six days while the transport animals recovered from the effects of the journey across the desert from Nushki. During these few days we became more familiar with the country, and found it was not nearly so wild as the jungle made it appear.

The feature that strikes the spectator most forcibly in the valley of the Middle Helmand is the almost complete absence of trees. In this respect it resembles Seistan. The variety of tamarisk that forms the jungle along the river is not a tree; it is merely an overgrown shrub. Captain Edward Conolly, who visited Seistan in 1839, mentions that a few years previously, a chief of the country had imported twelve hundred young mulberry trees. They must have died out, for we saw only three or four near Deshu, and a few others a long way below Khwāja Ali.

Khwāja Ali itself is a collection of wattled huts

daubed over with clay, situated on the site of an ancient village of which vestiges still remain. When Christie entered the Helmand valley in 1810 the place was unoccupied. At the time of our visit it was the home of a colony of the Mamasseni Baluch, a tribe with settlements distributed over a wide area. The huts were of a type which we found to be common along the banks of the Helmand and in Seistan. Mats and hurdles of tamarisk twigs are placed over a framework made with the branches of the tamarisk, and the whole is then plastered over with wet mud. The roof is rounded and the structures resemble the tilt of a wagon. The plan is rectangular. A small hole in the roof lets out the smoke, while a larger hole in one of the sides serves as a doorway—though the only "door" is a hurdle placed against the opening at night. On the outskirts of a settlement of Baluchis proper there will always be found a collection of black blanket tents, the true home of the nomad.

Cattle, which are scarce and costly, need shelter as well as men from the fierce north-west wind which is the great enemy to life in all this country. They are generally penned in chambers dug out of the soil and roofed over for protection, a sloping ramp affording means of egress. Cattle and donkeys are moreover clothed with quarter pieces made of felt, generally much the worse for wear and very much patched. Sheep and goats, being amply provided by nature with a protection against cold, are herded in pens surrounded by a fence.

At Khwāja Ali we met the complimentary escort, con-

sisting of detachments of cavalry and infantry, that had been sent to do honour to Sir Henry McMahon, who, with his suite, became the guests of H.M. the Amir till we crossed into Persian territory. These troops were a part of the garrison of Kandahar, and appeared to be a very serviceable body of men. The officers were dressed in very effective uniforms, resplendent with gold lace. A civil officer who accompanied them, his attire a grey suit and his head-dress a grey helmet with a flowing puggaree, served as an excellent foil to his brother officers in their martial array.

While at Khwāja Ali we noticed for the first time that the Helmand had begun to rise. Below this place the raft on inflated skins, brought from the Punjab, and the collapsible Osgood-pattern boat were in daily use and proved invaluable. The latter was probably the first boat that had been seen at so low a point of the river's course for very many centuries. Almost a thousand years ago boats sometimes came down the river to Seistan during the floods, but boat traffic has ceased for nearly that length of time; not because the river has ceased to be navigable, but owing to the fact that the bent of people's minds lay in other directions.

To the officers who sometimes accompanied the Commissioner by water, the Osgood boat afforded a pleasant change from the routine of marches performed at the head of a very large and noisy cavalcade, when a ceremonious interchange of platitudes with the leading persons met by the way was all the conversation possible.

Landi (or the Colony) of the Barechis marks the end of



THE HELMAND AT KHWÀJA ALI. THE OSGOOD BOAT AND RAFT OF INFLATED SKINS.

the first stage below Khwāja Ali. On the way we crossed what from Khwāja Ali had looked like an island splitting the valley in two and having a river channel on either side of it. Bearing in mind the stories that had been related to the Afghan Boundary Commission in 1896, to the effect that the Shela had once been a bed of the Helmand, we had been on the look-out for any point at which the present channel might seem to break off from an older bed, and the view down stream from Khwāja Ali raised hopes that the discovery was near at hand. But we were doomed to be disappointed. Closer examination showed that the supposed island was an under-feature of the terrace on the left of the river—a fin-like wedge which projected across the valley and thrust the river against the cliffs on the right, leaving only a narrow passage. This projecting under-feature is of importance as a land-mark, for not only does it indicate the limit of the Khwāja Ali district, but it is also the limit of the larger district called the Garmsir, which extends from this point up stream as far as Kāla Bist.

Pulalak, which we passed on our right a little further on, is only a small hamlet. Before we arrived at Landi of the Barechis rain began to fall and drove us into shelter, where we remained for the rest of the day. As far as we could see, the valley appeared to widen, but we had no opportunity of looking about us after arriving in camp. The rain continued through the night, and the next morning the valley was filled with a dense mist or fog which clung to the sodden earth and hung about the cliffs on either hand. It was impossible to see more than a few yards

ahead in any direction when we started. We saw nothing of the habitations of the Barechis, nor of the people, and for all we knew to the contrary we might have been passing through a deserted region.

As the day wore on the mist began to disperse, and by the time we reached the vicinity of our camp at Rudbār the last of it had vanished. Ahead of us we saw what looked like an enormous pile of ruins, but the appearance of great size was only another instance of the refraction which magnifies the most commonplace objects. Villages, houses, ruins, which appear at a distance to be of the most imposing proportions, nearly all shrink to insignificance on closer acquaintance. This illusion affects everything Persian, and gives rise to a sense of disappointment when the illusion is dispelled.

Our camp at Rudbār was placed in a wide plain covered with a growth of kirt grass, near two tamarisk trees of the Kora Gaz variety which are conspicuous landmarks. Here we saw cattle grazing and groups of agriculturists at work. Scattered over the plain and mingling with the huts of the people were numerous ruins. It was a type of landscape with which we became very familiar in Seistan.

The afternoon of the 11th February, 1903, was mild and clear, and as there was nothing in particular to be done in camp, I obtained permission to cross the river and ascend the bluffs that rose from the water's edge on the opposite bank. The raft of inflated skins was put into commission and we were soon across the Helmand, which had begun to show the effect of the rain that had fallen in

the increased volume and heightened colour of its discharge. A sudden rise, followed by an equally sudden subsidence, had just taken place, and the stretches of shingle and pebbles which divided the channels in which the river was flowing had been covered with a thin coating of red silt brought down by the water. A gently sloping col connected the bluffs opposite to the camp with the main terrace of the Dasht-i-Margo, which lay about forty yards further back from the river. The bluffs and the terrace rose to an altitude of more than two hundred feet above the river bank, and from the summit of the former a very extensive view was obtained.

In the valley below, the friable sandy loam had dried very quickly after the sun had dispelled the damp mist of the forenoon, and the freshening western breeze was already raising the dried soil in tiny whirligigs of dust. These formed a thin veil over the landscape up and down the river, and it was not possible to see much more than the silver ribbon of water in the western reaches, fringed with belts of tamarisk. To the east the river bed lay in a straight line, enfiladed by the bluffs, with the water channel lying hard against the foot of the Dasht-i-Margo. The view in this direction was interrupted by another headland round which the Helmand made a gentle bend in its course, and when the river again appeared higher up the valley, the fading light and thin films of dust rendered its position barely visible.

Below the bluffs, just across the river, lay our great camp, the white tents spreading in orderly blocks on either side of the wide main street, closed at one end by our

imposing mess-tent, before which a tall mast supported the Union Jack, blowing stiffly out from the staff in the freshening evening breeze. On the outskirts of the main camp were the less orderly bivouacs of the transport drivers, where 2,300 camels were grouped in densely-packed masses. Though the distance must have been between one and two miles, the hum of voices and the cries of animals ascended faintly over the water.

It was a perfect evening, one of those which even in the clear and rarefied atmosphere of the desert are not very common, and which are long remembered by anyone who has witnessed them. The rain that had fallen recently had laid the dust and dispelled the haze with which the atmosphere had been charged for weeks past, and the colouring of the scene gave to it added beauty. Overhead the sky was a soft deep blue, the depth of its colour being heightened by a few scattered rags of fleecy clouds, shaded on their under sides by varying tones of warm and pearly grey. Along the western horizon the blue of the sky gradually paled and finally merged into a delicate rosy flush. To the south, beyond the camp, the terrace that intervened between the Helmand and the Hollow of Zireh showed a rich dark brown, while the slopes that rose from the farther side of the Hollow towards the south were covered with a wide expanse of sand, the pale red colour of which was flecked by long cool shadows cast by the sand dunes. Upstream the view was closed by the peaks of the Khānishin, bathed by the rays of the declining sun in a glow of crimson light.

Beyond Khānishin and across the desert, stretching round to the south and west, extended a succession of peaks, the steely blue colour of which was sharply contrasted against the softer hues of the sky. Every crag and pinnacle of the Mālak Dokand, and the Mālak Nāro, even the low hills at their feet, were plainly visible. The pinnacles of the Kuh-i-Sultān, flanking the central summit of the Miri peak, could be plainly recognised. Even the Neza-i-Sultān was distinctly seen. Then in succession followed the peaks of Dām-o-Dīm, and to the west again of it the Sork Kuh, a range of low hills among which was visible the cone of the Kuh-i-Dalil. Then followed a confused blur of lesser hills, and to the west again of these rose the more distinctive peaks of the Kacha Kuh, just visible above the desert.

Although some of these mountains were more than a hundred miles distant, yet their summits were clearly recognisable. The panorama spread out before me contained the record of many years spent in travel. Each peak and group was connected with events in the past; and old associations and memories were recalled to mind which had been partially forgotten and thrust out of sight by the events of more recent years. There was nothing to interrupt the ideas, or to distract the mind, for the calm of the evening was, if anything, heightened by the faint sounds of life and movement in the great camp below; till at last the echoing bugle-calls of the escort, marking the close of the day, brought the mind back to the realities of time and place.

During the two and a half years the Mission tarried

in the land of Nimruz there were evenings as clear as that at Rudbār, but except on one occasion, almost two years afterwards, never again was there a standpoint so favourable for an extensive view, and few scenes have more definitely impressed themselves on my memory.

While the Mission was at Rudbār a strange sequel was revealed to a skirmish that had taken place in 1899. In February of that year a party of men, all notorious thieves, stole across the Afghan frontier from the Rud into British territory, and carried away some camels. Three or four mounted Levies under Adam Khan, the Sarperah Jamadar, were sent in pursuit, and came up with the raiders in the sand hills near Gudar-i-Shah. Two of the thieves took up a position to cover the flight of their comrades with the camels, and as soon as the Levies came within range these men opened fire; but they were armed only with matchlocks, while the Levies had either Snider or Martini carbines.

The skirmish soon ended, and when the Levies went up to examine the position they found—as they thought—two dead men. They gave these a very hasty burial in the loose sand, and returned to the Webb-Ware's camp. But one of the thieves was by no means dead. He had been shot high up through the shoulder, and when the clean sand staunched the flow of blood he regained consciousness. The wind blew off the sand with which he had been partially covered, and there the dead and the living man lay on the sand hill, side by side. The skirmish had taken place on one of the desert highways, and presently a party of travellers happened to pass. They buried the

dead man and took the wounded thief to Rudbār, where he soon recovered. But he had had enough of raiding, and thenceforward engaged in agriculture as being more profitable and less risky. On our arrival at Rudbār in 1903 he was brought into camp, displayed the scar of his wound, and was publicly reconciled to Adam Khan. Every Baluch in camp probably gave him a feed, and for the time he was quite the lion of the place.

On the 13th February the Mission continued its progress, and we began to look forward to the time, now close at hand, when the monotonous routine of daily marches would give place to more leisurely movements in a country where we anticipated much that would be novel and interesting. About five miles from our camp at Rudbār we were met by the Governor of Chakānsur, who had been appointed as the representative of His Majesty the Amir. The Governor was an old friend. He had participated in the Commission of 1896, and had been one of the party who had set up Pillar No. 186 on the Kuh-i-Malik Siah. He had come sixty miles from his seat of government to do honour to Sir Henry McMahon in his double capacity as British Commissioner and an old friend. This was not a light undertaking for an elderly person, such as was the Governor of Chakānsur. As a member of a priestly family he possessed the hereditary title of Akhundzāda, and to all appearance was a man of liberal views and benevolent disposition.

His arrival had the effect of greatly increasing our day's march, as he was very anxious that we should go on to the place where the Afghans had collected supplies, and

not camp at the point (about half-way) where we had intended to halt for the night. This was a great blow to many, as it made any deviation from the track impossible, especially as no one had the vaguest idea how much farther than our intended camp we should have to go.

Shortly after meeting the Akhundzāda, we passed through a cultivated area where, in the midst of fields of young wheat, we saw fragments of old walls and some strange looking mounds, each of which was crowned with a tamarisk bush. The ground for many acres was covered very thickly with the fragments of broken pottery, and at some period in the past—probably, as I found out afterwards, not more than three hundred years ago—the locality must have been very thickly populated. For some time we passed through a succession of formless ruins, which to me were chiefly interesting because they afforded evidence of the position of the river three hundred years ago. Most of these ruins were the remains of manor houses, partially fortified, which stood on the brow of a low cliff six to eight feet high. Where the buildings faced the terrace on which they stood, moats had been dug which had defended the buildings on three sides, and the ends of the moats formed well-defined exits. It was plain that when the houses were built the moats must have been fed by the river, and at that time all this tract, now a waste of ruins, was famous for its pasturage.

Once only did we approach the present bed of the Helmand so closely as to look into it. At that point the river made a marked bend, and a bar of shingle separated

two great pools which were fringed with the Padag (*Salyx babylonica*) or Babylonian willow. Over the bar the rushing water broke into a thousand ripples, and although it was only one of the channels in which the Helmand flows, the scene was one which an artist would have loved to depict. But with a march of an indefinite length in prospect, we could not even stop to get out a camera, and after a lingering glance had to hurry on.

The afternoon was drawing to a close as we urged our riding camels along the path, and we began to overtake the rear sections of the transport column which had been sent on ahead the previous night. Both the drivers and their mobs of camels were evidently tired out. We were in better condition, and some striking ruins and an interesting bit of country almost tempted me to turn aside. But more prudent counsels prevailed, and soon it became evident that we were not far from our destination. In the distance we saw a great cloud of dust rising, and a little later we could see that it was stationary and knew that the end of our journey for the day was close at hand. Half an hour later we reached the brow of a low cliff, and there in a little bay down by the Helmand we saw two or three tents standing, while on all sides unladen camels in long strings were being led away by their drivers towards the river, where they would be able to pick up food in the jungle by the water's edge before the night closed in.

Our camp was pitched close to a ruined fort, and across the river, hidden by the belt of jungle, was a small town-

ship called Jān Beg, where a Sanjarāni chief of that name had established himself several generations ago.

Nearly a century before, in 1810, Christie had passed along the banks of the Helmand at this point. The records of his journey, performed in very different circumstances from ours, are extremely scanty, and we could not help wishing, for purposes of comparison, that he had been able to draw up a fuller narrative. So far as we could judge, however, the valley of the Helmand in this particular section of the river's course has changed very little in the interval. The names of the townships situated on the bank opposite to our camp on the night of the 12th are the same now as they were in 1810. The only change that has taken place is in the position of the river itself. Although he does not say so, Christie's narrative implies that the river flowed close to the cliffs on the left-hand side of the valley. Now it flows on the right-hand side, hugging the foot of the Dasht-i-Margo plateau, from Landi Wali Muhammad to the hamlet of Jān Beg.

A little below Jān Beg, on the same side of the river, there is a township called Husenābād, and from this place Christie's guides took him over the plateau by a short cut which brought him out close to the banks of the Helmand again, a good distance lower down. This short cut still exists, and is used at the present day, but it is not a road we could have followed, and we continued our way along the left bank of the river, deferring our crossing to a place much further down stream.

But before the narrative is resumed, mention ought to

be made of the breaking up of the hitherto continuous plateau of the Dasht-i-Margo, and to a curious feature in the country which the people, not without reason, have named the "Inferno."

The Margo plateau ends almost on the meridian of Jān Beg, and the western scarp of the plateau overlooks the plains of Seistan, and forms the boundary of that country on the east. There still runs, however, along the right bank of the Helmand below Jān Beg, for a distance of some forty miles or so, a narrow plateau from ten to twelve miles in width, like the horn of a great crescent. This is known as the Dasht-i-Meski, and in the angle formed by the Dasht-i-Meski and the Dasht-i-Margo, the face of the latter plateau is broken by a great cleft where a softer material has been scoured out, either by wind alone or by the action of wind and water.

This breach is some twenty miles wide by about thirty long, and there are signs that the forces of erosion are still at work, in a manner which tends not so much to widen the cleft as to drive it deeper into the plateau and at the same time nearer to the Helmand. The winter rains wash down the looser material, and in the summer the fierce north-west wind blows up the breach and carries away great masses of material. Already the opening extends as far back almost as the meridian of our camp at Rudbār, and only some four miles of plateau separate it from the Helmand valley. In course of time the forces of erosion will cut back into the valley, and at a time still more remote, if the process goes on, it may be that the Helmand will be turned into the breach and

the whole scheme of human existence in Seistan will have to be altered to suit the new conditions.

About half-way between our camp at Rudbār and that opposite to Jān Beg we observed that the wind has already cut to a slight extent through the top of the narrow strip of plateau that separates the river valley from the breach on the other side. When we marched down the Helmand there was a gap in the outline of the plateau on the other side of the river some four or five miles wide and some fifty feet deep. Through this gap the wind sweeps and every summer it will be enlarged and deepened.

But if the wind cuts into the plateau it also brings into the opening formed vast quantities of sand from the plains of Seistan. In this sense the breach in the plateau is Nature's giant dustbin for the Helmand delta. From near the south-east corner there are visible only great billows of sand. Some of the drifts must be a hundred feet deep. No living thing can exist there, and not a sound breaks the silence except the moaning of the wind as it eddies in the narrow shoots and gorges which have been cut in the surrounding plateau.

It is this which is the Jehannam—the Inferno of Seistan.

No one is so hardy as to enter the Inferno from the south-east corner, but close to the entrance on the west there are two small pans or depressions where rain-water collects and forms small pools. In one of the pans there is a clump of tamarisk, and the pan is named the "Place of Tamarisks." In themselves neither of these pans is

worthy of notice, but they appear to have been, in a way, the cause of a terrible disaster which took place on the Dasht-i-Margo in connection with the Mission, which will be related in its place. Sometimes a shepherd will enter the Inferno after the rains and place his camp close to the water, but he leaves as soon as the cold weather is over, and gloomy horror broods undisturbed over a tract which is the embodiment of the desolating, sterilising forces of Nature.

## CHAPTER VI.

### A LAND OF OLD RENOWN.

Characters of the Helmand—Camp opposite Chahārburjak—The useful mulberry tree—Shortage of fuel—Introduction of Akhundzāda to the Mission—Break up camp—The Rud—Kamāl Khan's mud fort as a market—Memories of the Rud as a granary—Rustam's Weir and its destruction by Timur Leng—A clever camel—Dangerous fords—A meat diet for fast camels—Infuriated camels—A narrow escape—Albino camels—Bandar-i-Kamāl Khan—Remains of a Zoroastrian Tower of Silence—The City of Rustam—A weary night ride.

After our exceptionally long march on February 12th to the camp opposite Jān Beg, the start on the following morning was of a more leisurely character than usual. The next stage was to be a short one, and it had been arranged that we should encamp near to a little town where a formal reception was to be held for the purpose of presenting the members of the Mission to the Akhundzāda.

Below the camp opposite Jān Beg we found that the Helmand deserted the right side of the valley, making a sweep to the left as it approached the great bend where it turns towards the north. The cultivable land and the townships were all on the right bank, and the river drove us to keep to the toe of the last terrace on the left bank. We saw a good deal of the river, but here its appearance was commonplace. In a wide bed, consisting of sand and shingle, a broad stream of water curved from one

bank to the other, sometimes flowing in one channel, and at others broken up by the presence of islands into two or more streams. Stunted tamarisk bushes grew along the banks, and more stunted bushes on the shingly islands, while beyond the river rose the slopes of the Dasht-i-Meski, scarred and worn by the action of the weather into a network of ravines. Here and there a rapid broke the even flow of the water, where a bar of shingle or of "kim" stretched across the river.

Camp that day was pitched opposite the little town of Chahārburjak. The Boundary Commission in 1885, on their way to Herat, had crossed the river slightly higher up and pitched their camp to the west of Chahārburjak. This place, as likely as not, takes its name from the four little pepper-box towers at the corners of four walls, which enclose a rectangular space containing the dwellings that make up the town. Some of the population seemed, however, to have overflowed the walls, and there were groups of mud huts as well as gardens scattered round the town like small suburbs.

Here we saw mulberry trees, perhaps a dozen in all, bare of leaves, but still real trees. Since leaving Deshu, we had seen about three willows at Landi of the Barechis, and two Kora Gaz trees at Rudbār, otherwise the tamarisk was the only shrub larger than the alkali bush that we had met. Even when in leaf tamarisk grows monotonous after a time, but in the winter, when much of its foliage has been shed, leaving bare branches of a dark sepia colour, it always looks mean. It supplies, however, almost all the wood available, and is made to serve many and useful

purposes by the inhabitants of the country in which it grows in such profusion.

The only other timber is the wood of fruit trees, and of these the mulberry is the only one that attains to any size. Being so scarce, its wood is much too valuable for ordinary purposes, and it is only used when articles of a special nature are required. The general use to which it is put is to make gun-stocks. The ingenious wooden locks, by means of which the Seistanis close the gates of their gardens, are also made of mulberry wood, as something heavier and more durable than tamarisk is needed for this purpose. It is, therefore, not to be wondered at that a mulberry tree that has died in the ground is valuable. Such trees would never be felled for timber unless they were the property of some proscribed individual. It may, therefore, be due to the state of anarchy that has prevailed for so many centuries in the past that the valley of the Middle Helmand has been denuded of trees. In Seistan it is different. There the raging, tearing "Wind of 120 Days" is the cause why trees, as a general rule, cannot thrive. The one tree which will grow in Seistan if it is very carefully looked after, the Babylonian willow, is of no use for timber. It is, however, a handsome tree, and might be grown more generally than it is—for shade as well as for its foliage and shape.

We were uncommonly glad to have even tamarisk fuel with which to keep ourselves warm, and curiously enough, while our eyes were gladdened at Chahārburjak with the sight of trees, it was precisely at that place that we experienced our first shortage of fuel. The district supported a

fairly numerous agricultural population, and there were also a good many nomads in the townships and on the land generally, so that there had been great demands made on the local supplies for firing. The lands also across the river had been under the plough, so that whatever fuel supply there was existed in the river bed.

On the 14th February the ceremony of introducing the Akhundzāda to the Mission generally took place, but as my services were required elsewhere I was unable to take part in the ceremony.

On the 15th we broke up our camp and proceeded on our way. The path led along the foot of a cliff for some distance, and then through a succession of ravines till we reached the western elbow of the Helmand, where there was at one time a fortified post of wide reputation. From the track we could see the ruins of this place, which had been built by one Kamāl Khan, a chief of the Sanjarāni Baluch. For centuries past the valley of the Helmand up to and including the district of Rudbār has been known simply as the Rud, that is, the River Valley, and within the Rud, Kamāl Khan's fortalice and Rudbār district were the two most famous places. Hither resorted trains of donkeys and camels, whose passing feet have worn the well-defined tracks leading across the gravel-covered terraces and converging on the Rud. In years of famine, and even of scanty rainfall, these desert highways used to be thronged with traders going up to fetch grain, and Rudbār and Bandar-i-Kamāl Khan became household words as far south as the coasts of the Persian Gulf, and east as far as Kirmān. Kamāl Khan's little mud fort,

indeed, obtained a fame quite disproportionate to its size. It was really less of a fort than a market—hence the name Bandar—where salt fish from Gwādar and Pasni and piece goods from Bandar Abbas and Gwādar were exchanged for grain.

To this day Bandar-i-Kamāl Khan is a well-known name, though chiefship and authority have passed out of the hands of Kamāl Khan's descendants, and the fort is now partly hidden by sand hills. From the south, caravans no longer make for the Helmand, as Quetta and its outpost of Nushki have supplanted Rudbār and Bandar as trading centres; but there still cling about the Rud memories of its former proud position as one of the granaries of this remote corner of Asia.

Before we arrived at Bandar-i-Kamāl Khan, about five miles from our camp opposite Chahārburjak, we passed the ruins of a small building on the edge of the cliff, overlooking the valley. This is said to have been a small fortified post named Rodin—one of two which guarded the famous weir across the Helmand on which for nine months of the year, according to tradition, the irrigation system of Seistan used to depend for its supply of water. This was the famous Band-i-Rustam—Rustam's Weir, Rustam of course being the legendary Prince of Seistan of whose exploits marvellous tales are told all over the country. In the neighbouring channel of the present river there was a bar of "kim," which would be a suitable foundation for such a work, but no traces of it are to be found to-day. There can be no doubt either that such a work existed or that it was one of considerable magnitude,

since there are historical records of its destruction by Timur Leng (Tamerlane) in January, 1384, and since it is recorded that the famous conqueror halted his army for the purpose.

The cultivators of the lands at Bandar have dug a canal which takes off from the Helmand above that place. The track we followed crosses the canal just before ascending the terrace on the far side. In making the crossing a fine camel which I was riding showed how handy an animal a well-trained riding camel can become. The canal had steep banks, and these had been liberally splashed with water after the transport carrying our advance camp had crossed it. It was easy enough to slip into the canal, but not an easy matter to get out on the other side; however, the riding camel was not to be beaten, and as he came up to the bank, he gently sank on his knees and pushed himself up with the full strength of his hind quarters. Then as soon as his knees reached the top, he rose and came up the bank with a rush.

Afterwards we learned that the leading sections of our advanced transport had come up to the canal in the dark, and every camel had fallen in getting in or out of the water. Loads had to be taken off and the men in attendance had found it a long task to get the loads across and on the animals again. Hence the bad condition of the bank on the far side.

The real crossing of the canal lay about twenty yards to the left. We had not become used to the peculiarity which prevails in Seistan, that a crossing is rarely practicable where a track first strikes a canal. It is

also advisable to be careful how one enters the water at such places, for when canals are low the inhabitants dig shallow wells in the beds of the irrigation cuts, and no place is so convenient as the side of the path that crosses it. When the canal fills again there is nothing to show the position of these wells, and though a hole may be shallow regarded as a well, it may be a very nasty trap for the unwary traveller to fall into.

Many a time I have been headed off by an excited Seistani, who has left his plough or spade work, to stop me from crossing by some apparently broad and well-used ford, and has directed me to a place which looked barely practicable, but where no traps existed under the water. It struck one very forcibly that this anxiety to warn unwary travellers was a most praiseworthy trait in the character of the people of the country. In course of time, however, those persons whom duty, or a restless disposition, or an inquisitive mind used to lead abroad—greatly to their own benefit—became very accomplished guides themselves, and acquired the knowledge that in Seistan, as elsewhere, the broad and easy path, however tempting it might appear to be, very often led those who followed it into an ugly predicament.

At Bandar-i-Kamāl Khan, although the head of the community is a Baluch—a Sanjarāni—yet his cultivators or *métayers* belong to the Afghan tribe called Barech—the same that occupies the lands at Landi of the Barech and in Shorāwak. The cultivators at Wali Muhammad Khan also belong to this tribe, who seem to possess a hereditary aptitude for agricultural pursuits. In Shorāwak

they raise also or used to raise camels, and the female camels of that district used to be very highly esteemed in the days when raiding was regarded as an honourable calling, if not the only profession open to a gentleman. A man's life might depend then on the speed and endurance of his mount, and camels used for riding on a foray were carefully prepared for the work to be done. A meat diet, the flesh of a sheep with the fat of its tail, and "ghi" marked the last stage of the preparation, and followed a course of feeding on grain. By the time a camel had eaten a whole sheep it was supposed to be thoroughly ready for hard and fast work lasting over a long period of time.

The camels of the Rud were likewise held in high estimation. But though there are extensive desert tracts all around, the camels generally found in this region are of little or no value for sustained hard work. The country is so poor and the vegetation, even in years of good rainfall, so quickly withers under the influence of the sun, that it does not supply enough nourishment, consequently the animals are weedy, and quite unsuited for transport purposes; and even as riding animals they are of very little good. They die in Seistan with the same paralyzing readiness displayed by camels purchased in foreign parts.

In passing it may be noted that in Khārān camels in great numbers used to be raised which were of a useful type, but these were celebrated for their bad tempers. In 1887 I and my orderly, while out shooting, were attacked by a male camel which was in a furious

condition. To shoot the beast would have been a very extreme course to pursue and might have led to complications, and certainly would have entailed paying any price that the owner demanded. With great difficulty we drove off the infuriated brute. Its attention was then attracted to some children who were playing near at hand. Suddenly it charged at them and was almost up to them before they noticed it and fled towards the tents. Some of the little mites would certainly have been caught had not a boy torn off his ragged sheepskin cloak and flung it before the raging beast. The camel stopped at once, seized the coat in his teeth, and after worrying it for a time threw it down and knelt on it, working his knees till he had rubbed it to bits on the ground. The children escaped.

Some time afterwards I knew of a case where a male camel treated its owner in the same way in the rutting season, pressing with its knees till the man's ribs and breastbone were crushed, and the life squeezed out of him.

Albino camels are by no means rare among the animals bred in the desert. For instance, to return to the Seistan Mission, Webb-Ware's Jemadar of Chaprassis rode a white camel. The latter was about the size of an ostrich, and the owner of it was a man of a fine presence. Some perhaps might have even said he was fat. Mounted on his little white camel, which was adorned most lavishly with tassels and bands, and equipped with a pair of well worked saddle-bags, the Jemadar used to ride at the head of Webb-Ware's transport at the commencement of every

march, but as the little animal had a curious gait, with a high action but no speed, he was very soon at the rear of the caravan. This man and his charger made a curious spectacle, but by some unfortunate chance he was one of the few objects that either was not photographed, or the photograph of which never worked out.

Bandar-i-Kamāl Khan to-day is a collection of three or four hamlets situated in a small patch of sand dunes, but although the soil is sandy there were most excellent-looking crops growing at the time of our visit. Although the importance of this place as a trading centre has long ago departed, it occupies a very important position geographically, and at one time, only some two or three hundred years ago, stood at the head of the then delta of the Helmand. At the present time a wide bed of the Helmand, now quite dry, continues in a straight line from Bandar towards the west, under the name of the Rud-i-Biyabān—the River of the Desert—a most appropriate name.

At Bandar we emerged from the narrow valley of the Helmand. Abreast of the hamlets, the terrace that formed the watershed between that river and the hollow of Zireh terminates abruptly in very much worn pinnacles and cliffs fully a hundred and fifty feet above the lower terrace that stretches away from their base. At Bandar, also, the Helmand turns completely towards the north, having on its right bank the Dasht-i-Meski, and on its left a low gravel-covered terrace, extending towards the west and north. This terrace ends abruptly on the west, at some distance from the basin occupied by the modern

lake of Seistan, in a line of boldly projecting headlands, separated by wide and deeply indented bays. To the north it terminates in a low cliff overlooking the present delta of the Helmand.

The terrace is not a level expanse covered with gravel, but is broken into steps which are the result of an unequal subsidence in the beginning. It has been severely used by the wind in subsequent ages, and as a result its surface is torn and pitted with curious cup-like hollows. It is capped with a stratum of conglomerate which in every respect is similar to the conglomerate which covers the loftier terraces higher up the river.

We did not stop at Bandar-i-Kamāl Khan, but pushing on camped on the 15th at a place called Pādzalok, so named from an old memorial pillar at a little distance from our camp, marking the site of a battle. To the west of the camp the low heights forming the edge of the higher terrace could be seen, and the surface of the terrace itself was marked by a low rise, crowned by a cairn. From the top of this rise at sunset I and another officer of the party, Mr. T. R. J. Ward, saw in the distance towards the south-west a pile of ruins, evidently occupying a very commanding natural site. This, we were informed, was Trākun, or the "City of Rustam" (the national hero after whom the Great Weir was named). Across the river, there projected from the face of the Meski plateau a remarkable promontory known as the Headland of Mirābād, on which we afterwards discovered the remains of a Zoroastrian Tower of Silence, surrounded by more recent graves, showing how some community

converted to Islam had used the neighbourhood of the tower to bury their dead.

As it had been decided to halt at Pādzalok on the 16th, Mr. Ward and myself determined to visit the site of Trākun. From Sir Henry McMahon we obtained not only permission but the use of his own riding camels. In order to incur no risk of missing the site, we returned first of all to Bandar, and from that place followed the channel of the "River of the Desert," close to which we knew the ruins were situated. It was painfully tedious travelling. We were compelled to go slowly as the wind had cut the long-deserted river-bed into a maze of shallow ravines. About mid-day, after covering some twelve miles from Bandar, we halted for a short time to rest our animals and to refresh ourselves with food. A Baluch lad, attracted by the fine camels, left his flock to its own devices and entered into conversation with us, and volunteered the very useful information that if we kept to the river-bed we should have even worse ground to traverse than we had hitherto met with. We decided, therefore, to abandon the river, and to keep to the terrace on its north bank.

Once we had reached this we were able to push on at a good pace, but, notwithstanding our diligence, the sun was low by the time we found ourselves upon the brow of the plateau, looking into an extensive loop in which the river lay to our left. The wreck of a civilisation of a not very remote period was spread out before us. About four miles ahead we could recognise against the evening sky the silhouette of a great pile (as we thought) of build-

ings, to the south-west of which a series of undulating heights, resembling mounds of *débris*, looked like the remains of a great city.

Descending to the plain, we made our way as fast as we could past ruined buildings and over the traces of old canals, threading our way through a labyrinth of wind scours, until at last we found ourselves in the long shadow cast by Trākun. That which we had believed to be the acropolis was the town itself. The mounds of *débris* beyond proved to be a chain of natural heights, less than a quarter of a mile from the town. The north-eastern and south-western ends of these heights were crowned with old buildings.

The town, or fortress, was built on an isolated ridge of rock, oriented almost due north and south, about a thousand feet in length and some five hundred feet in width, sloping upward from the east. The ruins lie on this slope. To the east, at the foot of the slope, the fortress was protected by a high wall, while the other side and both ends are protected by a precipice. This "City of Rustam" is said to be of great age, but it was evident that it had been inhabited recently. Previous to the invasions of the Arabs, it is said, there was at this same place a famous Pyrœum. On our ride across the wind-scoured plain, close to Trākun, we saw plenty of bivalve shells, similar to those which now are found in the Lake of Seistan. Those we gathered near Trākun were very old and fragile. It would appear as if the wide loop in which these ruins are situated was at some remote period permanently under water.

A very desolate landscape unfolds itself from the ridge of Trākun. In the foreground every butte and headland is crowned with old tombs—domed buildings sometimes of considerable height. In the plains below the ruins were the remains of vegetation, parched and withered by prolonged drought, while in the background extended a panorama of noble mountains, beginning with the Kacha and Lar Kuh on the south and ranging to the Palangān Kuh on the west.

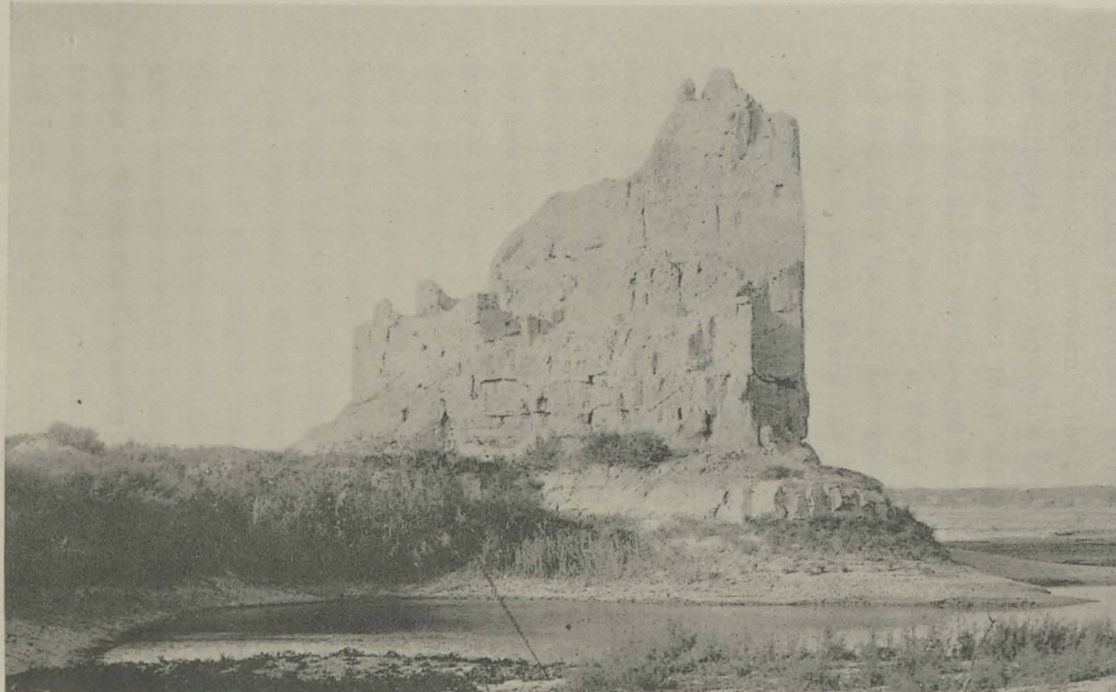
Our time was limited, and we had a long way to travel over an unknown country before we could reach our camp, so after a very cursory examination of the ruins we hurried down to our camels, which had found a pool of rain-water below and were nibbling the less parched twigs of the alkali bush and desert tamarisk. A short mile from Rustam's city the plateau country sloped gently to the lower-lying lands along the old river-bed where we were riding, and we pushed our animals up this natural ramp at a rapid pace. In laying our course across the plateau it was necessary to get back as far as we could from the edge of the terrace, so as to avoid becoming involved in broken ground, as we might do if we kept too close to the edge. The night being dark, we should have been compelled to bivouac if this had happened. A great number of well-marked tracks led over the plain towards a village on the Helmand called Kala-i-Fath, but none of these were of use to us, as our camp was some twelve miles higher up stream.

At last, having laid our course, we took a certain star as our guide, and everybody was ordered to keep it before

his face. It was not possible to ride very fast, owing to the cup-like hollows worn in the ground by the wind. In the darkness it was impossible to judge how deep were these hollows, or what their banks were like. But we pushed on, and as we emerged from one of the hollows, suddenly there shot up a tiny point of light. A beacon had been lit by Captain Ramsay for our guidance, on the mound from which Ward and I had seen the ruins of Trākun the night before.

It was a weary ride in the dark. It appeared as if we were never to reach the beacon. The weather was bitterly cold, and at times all of us had to dismount and walk to restore circulation. Fortunately there was no wind. At last we saw a figure pass across the light and knew we were close to it, and shortly afterwards we were hailed by the men who were attending to the fire. We arrived in camp at half-past ten, having ridden during the day a distance of fifty-seven miles—not perhaps a long ride in point of distance, but still a satisfactory day's work, because we had looked at a large tract of country.

A long night ride through "new" country is a very trying experience. There is nothing by which it is possible to judge of the progress made. In even the poorest country in daylight curious things attract the mind and afford occupation which is impossible after darkness has set in. When the distance is known, one may judge from the time and rate of travelling what portion of the journey has been covered; but when this is not the case, the monotony of a lonely night ride becomes almost insupportable.



DIK-I-DELA.

Crag of Siwalik, crowned with miniature fortalice.

# CHAPTER VII.

## THE PASSAGE OF THE HELMAND.

A miniature mountain stronghold—The Sena Rud as a thieves' trail—Fights with cattle raiders—Brigandage an honourable profession in the past—Mashi—A useful tamarisk jungle—Kala-i-Fath—Great strength of the citadel—Five hundred square miles of ruins—Not previously explored by Europeans—Treasure-seekers and their finds—We cross the Helmand—An impressive spectacle—A terrified camel delays the march—How to take camels across deep water.

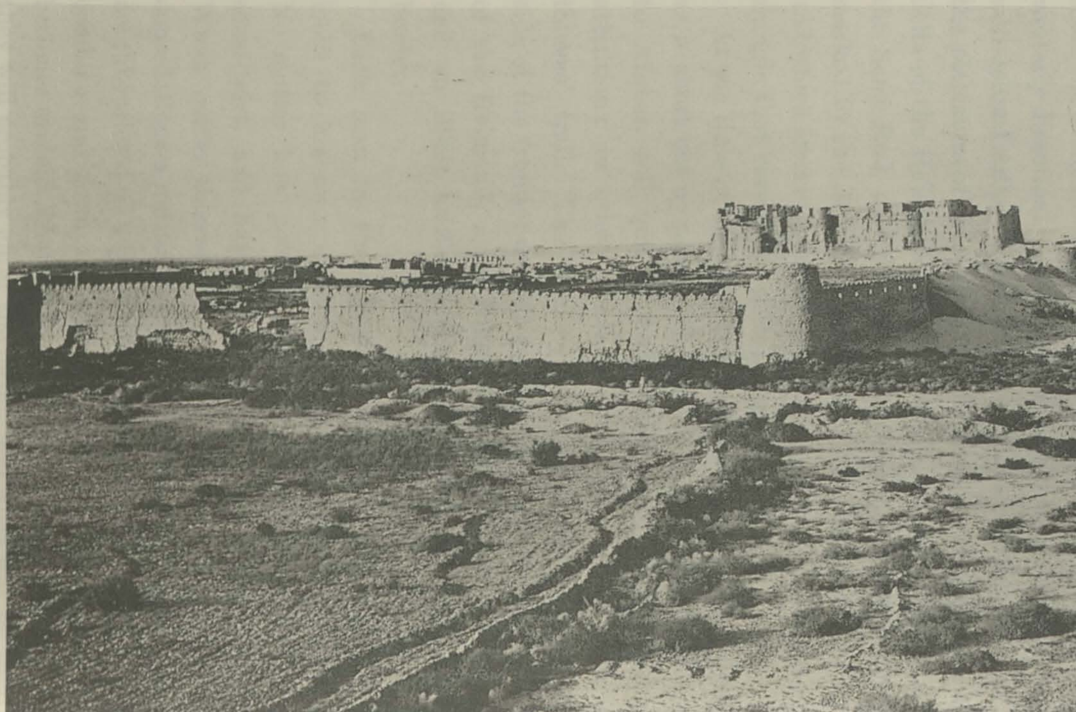
About five miles below our camp at Pādzalok were two very striking crags rising out of the river-bed. The material in these crags—the universal "kim"—appears to have been harder than in the surrounding strata, and in consequence they have withstood in a very remarkable degree the action of heat and cold and wind and water. The western pinnacle rises to a height of about a hundred feet above the bed of the river, the other to a height of about seventy feet. The larger crag is fortified up to the summit, where a tower crowns the short hatchet-like ridge. Every detail of a mountain stronghold is worked out in miniature, and the general effect is that of a model, rather than of an actual stronghold.

This miniature fortalice is named Dik-i-Dela—Dela's Peak. It is said to have been built by one Dela, who was the Satrap of this country under Naushirwān the Just, the famous Persian Sovereign of the House of Sassan, and it served to protect a weir that was built across the river.

Below this pinnacle an old branch of the river takes off from the Helmand and traverses the plateau in a north-westerly direction. After meandering through a wide and well-defined valley it terminates in a deep indentation of the plateau near the hamlet of Shamsābād, in the present delta of the Helmand. This branch is called by the people the Sena Rud, and the deep-water channel is still clearly marked by the dense ivory-coloured soil that has filled it, and which forms a marked contrast to the brown and black shingle that covers the plateau on either side.

At the time of our visit to Sẹistan the channel was used as a short cut by people who wished to pass from Persian to Afghan soil quickly and without attracting much attention; in other words, it had degenerated into a thieves' trail. The nomads who dwell on the Persian side of the frontier are kin to those who live on the banks of the Helmand, near Dik-i-Dela, in Afghan territory, and an illicit traffic in cattle is carried on across the border.

Each man in these parts is his own policeman and looks to his own exertions to safeguard his property. No matter how poor he may be, he possesses arms of some sort, and has some knowledge of using them. When cattle thieves have become over bold and their depredations a nuisance, the inhabitants of villages in the neighbourhood of a place where a robbery has taken place combine and form an organised pursuit. It very soon becomes evident what route the thieves have taken, where they will probably enter the dasht, and what will be their probable line of flight across the terrace. The pursuers,



KALA-I-FATH, LATE CAPITAL OF SEISTAN (FOUNDED A.D. 1427), NOW IN RUINS.

therefore, hurry on with the intention of outstripping the robbers and intercepting their retreat. Cattle travel slowly, and it is quite possible to get in advance of the raiders even when the latter have had a considerable start. Thanks to their intimate knowledge of the desert by-paths the thieves often manage to escape with their booty, but sometimes they walk into a trap and then the silence of the desert is broken by the sounds of a fierce conflict.

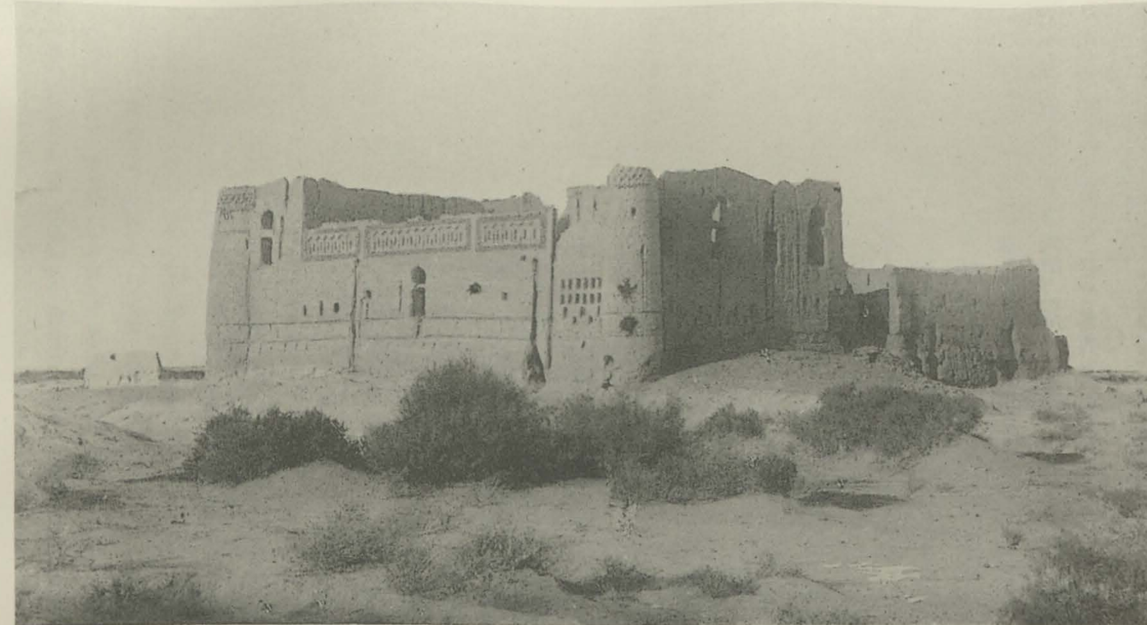
These struggles are made the occasion of settling many old feuds, and are fought out with a great deal of vindictiveness on both sides. Matchlocks and percussion muskets are discarded and the question is debated, hand to hand. When one party or the other has been put to flight the dead and the wounded are carried away. For a time the strong-winged ravens and vultures, drawn to the spot by the smell of blood, hover in wide circling flights over the scene of the struggle; but blood soon dries up on the thirsty gravel, and signs of the combat quickly disappear. A cairn or two is built to mark the spot, constituting a memorial which endures for centuries. Such memorials are to be found everywhere on the dasht, by the side of the paths that seam its terraces. If some notorious person should lose his life in one of these struggles, then the scene of the event is named after him, and Muhammad Kushta or Abbās Kushta, or the place where Muhammad or Abbās was killed, becomes widely known in the country around.

Brigandage or cattle-raiding, indeed, are secretly regarded as honourable professions, implying in those who

follow such pursuits a strength of character which in bygone days has raised many who commenced life as ordinary reivers and highwaymen to thrones and wide-spread dominions. In these more prosaic times such gentlemen stand a much better chance of having the tendons of their legs separated as a punishment; and even if the offender is too useful a tool to be dealt with in this summary fashion, he generally succumbs sooner or later to his enemies.

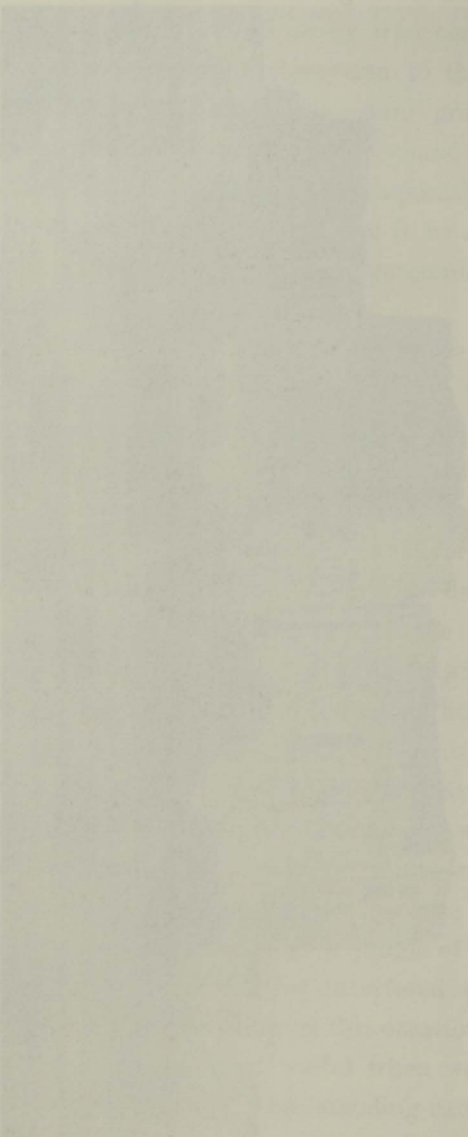
Beyond the Dik-i-Dela fort the route followed by the Mission led for some distance through the commonplace scenery of gravel-covered terraces and tamarisk jungle. We marched along the edge of the cliff overlooking the Helmand, which was now a wide expanse of rushing water. The weather had suddenly become milder, and the rise in the temperature had brought with it a dense brown haze, which concealed everything beyond the river and gave to the landscape the tones of a sepia drawing. It was just possible to make out the strong outline of the Meski plateau, looming faintly through the thick atmosphere.

Our destination, on the 18th February, 1903, was a locality named Māshi, where our camp was pitched in an irregular fashion on low-lying ground which was subject to inundation, and which in consequence of the moisture it received was covered with a jungle of tamarisk bushes of great size. The latter interfered with the orderly arrangement of our camp on this occasion, but afterwards the jungle proved most useful when we came to house ourselves in Seistan. Our standing camp was only eight or nine miles from this place, and we were able to get



FORTIFIED HOUSE, PALANGI RUINS, NEAR KALA-I-FATH.

Showing architectural details in sun-dried brick and clay mortar or plaster.



beams from ten to eleven feet in length to roof the huts that had to be erected.

About two miles to the east of the Helmand in this section of its course is Kala-i-Fath, the most modern of all the former capitals of Seistan. It was here that two and a half centuries ago the Kaiāni Prince, Hamza Khān, was compelled to take refuge from an Indian army that invaded Seistan during the reign of the Grand Mogul, Shah Jahan. Since that time the detachment of Indian troops that formed the Mission's escort was the first body of Indian soldiers that had penetrated so far into the country.

When Christie passed through Seistan, in 1810, he was told that the fortress and palace of Kala-i-Fath were in some sort of repair, but he was not able to visit them. Since then the process of decay has been going on unchecked, and the Kala-i-Fath of to-day, in striking contrast to its name, which means the Castle Victorious, presents a melancholy spectacle of neglect and ruin. The citadel, within which the palaces are situated, retains some semblance of the original structure, and from a little distance it might still be thought an imposing pile of buildings. Closer acquaintance soon shows that here, as elsewhere, the forces of decay have been busily at work; but even in its ruin the fortress is of great interest as a genuine relic of mediæval architecture, with an authentic history dating from its foundation. Beneath its walls have been enacted some of the most stirring scenes witnessed in Seistan during the past five hundred years.

Originally the citadel must have been of great strength. The outer walls are of enormous thickness, and have suffered less than any other part of the ancient capital from the ravages of time. They rise to a height of fully forty or fifty feet, and would show to even better advantage than they do were they not dwarfed by the great Plateau of the Dasht-i-Meshki, at the foot of which the castle stands. Altogether, this stronghold is a very fine example of the architecture of mediæval times, when the people of Seistan raised vast structures in which baked bricks were sparingly used, and then chiefly to elaborate details of architectural ornamentation. The builders of those days obtained most excellent results with sun-dried brick and clay mortar and rammed earth or *pisé*. The latter when worked thoroughly sets well, and is practically indestructible in a country where the rain and snow-fall are both insignificant.

At the time of our visit a squalid and miserable collection of ruinous dwellings, inhabited by a few poverty-stricken people, surrounded the citadel, which itself was garrisoned by a detachment of Afghan troops. Beyond these hovels, in the midst of the patches of cultivated land which provided the villagers with the bare means of existence, might be seen fragments of the outer lines of the ancient city walls, emphasising the importance of the place in the past. Kala-i-Fath, indeed, is but one indication that the arid and desolate tract which now lies to the east of the Lower Helmand was once the home of a considerable population. Right away from the northern foot of the Dasht-i-Meshki to the shores of the Seistan



RUINED BUILDINGS INSIDE SAROTĀR.
Arch of unbaked Brick, in laminæ.

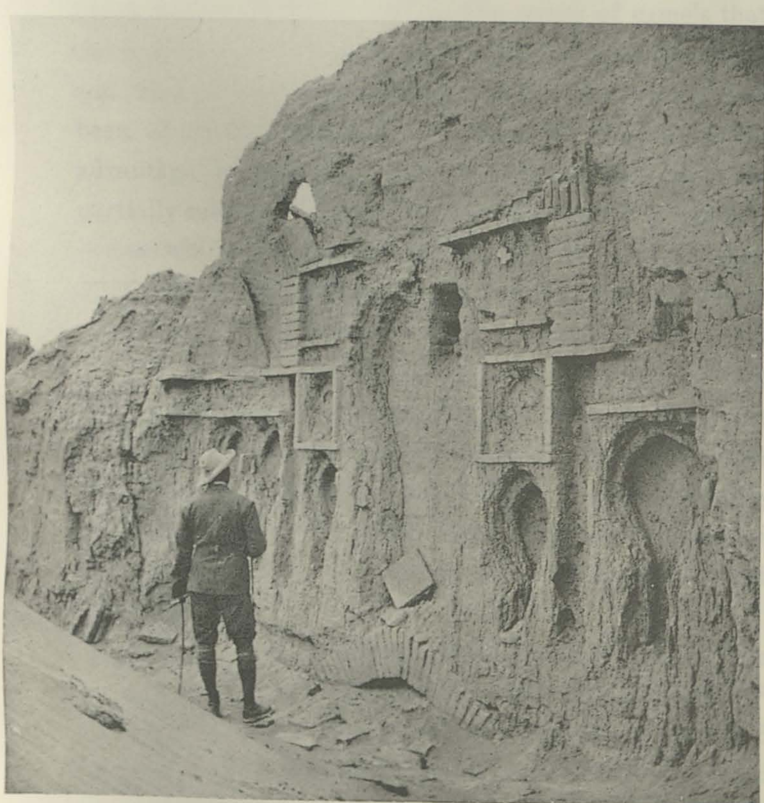
Lake the slowly descending plain is studded with the remains of manor houses and fortresses whose crumbling walls now afford a resting-place only for the sands which are hurried by the fierce north-west wind towards the Jehannam—the Inferno of Seistan.

One great series of ruins in particular, known as Sarotār, extends from near Kala-i-Fath northwards in an unbroken line to beyond Chakānsur, a distance of sixty miles, and covers an area of something like five hundred square miles. To-day it is a desolate waste, void of all inhabitants, and only entered once a year, after the winter rains have fallen, by the adventurous class of professional treasure-seekers known as the Dagāl Gardis—"Those who search the Ground." Their work is to collect the antiques, intaglios and coins, beads and other curious objects which the rain lays bare each year for a short time. They possess very keen sight, and will pick out small objects which another person has overlooked. They are quite uncivilised, incapable of elaborate forgeries, and there is not the least doubt that their finds are genuine, though at Meshed there are said to be one or two persons who do manufacture "antiques." Among the Sarotār ruins the remains that have come to light extend over a very wide range of time. Coins of Parthian and Sassanian kings are mixed with later mintages of the Caliphs and others still more recent, while on the other hand there have also been found a few archaic-looking pieces, evidently struck by some early and rude Scythian dynasty.

Before the Mission was over we came to know well this ruin-strewn region east of the Helmand, which till our

arrival had never been explored by Europeans. But at the time we were encamped at Māshi our chief concern was to get our huge caravan across the Helmand. The crossing was safely effected on the 20th and 21st of February, 1903, by the ford opposite to the camp at Māshi, which had become practicable owing to a slight subsidence that had taken place in the waters of the Helmand. The river at this point widens considerably, and on the day we crossed there extended from the left bank to within a short distance of the opposite shore a continuous series of sand-banks, covered at that time with only a few inches of water, and separated by channels only a little deeper.

This was a most favourable circumstance, and as the sand was firm and afforded a good foothold for our camels, the latter were able to reach the edge of the deep-water channel under the right bank without being fatigued and unnerved by a long and difficult crossing. On the farther side of the deep channel the bank sloped steeply. A path had been worn by the cattle of the neighbouring township on the Afghan side, which resorted to the river to drink, and by the local traffic across the ford, but this path was much too steep to be practicable for our laden camels. An hour or two spent in uninterrupted work, however, resulted in the original narrow and steep track being rendered much easier, and by the time that the leading sections of our transport filed out of the tamarisk jungle which concealed the camp at Māshi, and had been led down the gently sloping beach into the shallows formed by the sand banks, a crowd had gathered on the opposite side of the river, and there were willing arms waiting to receive the



AUTHOR EXAMINING RUINED BUILDING INSIDE SAROTĀR.

Material—Pisé with ornamental course of baked brick and voussoir arch of the latter.

struggling animals, and to help them up to the top of the path.

From this position a very fine view was to be had of the crossing, which constituted really a most impressive sight. There seemed to be no end to the string of camels that emerged from the jungle on the left bank of the river, and filed deliberately across its bed. Everything had been admirably organised. In order to gain as much advantage as possible from the shoals and spits of partially submerged sand, the camels followed a winding course which had been carefully explored up to the edge of the deeper water channel. To prevent crowding plenty of room was left between the different sections, and orders were issued that after a certain hour no more camels were to cross, so that the men who had been helping the animals up the path on the opposite side might have time to dry their garments before the chill of the evening set in. When work ceased there still remained some few sections on the left bank, which crossed the next morning.

We were very fortunate in the weather. Since the 18th, the maximum temperature had risen above 80° (Fahrenheit), while the minimum temperature recorded during the night had never fallen below 40°. The mild weather enabled us to cross without anybody being at all the worse for the long hours spent in the water.

As a spectacle, the passage of the Helmand was never surpassed during the rest of the time that the Mission spent in Seistan, and the only occasion on which it was approached at all closely was thirteen months later, when

we broke up our camp close to the ruined town of Jallalābād, and crossed the flooded lands between that place and the standing camp we had established on the brow of the plateau overlooking the delta. In the early days of our residence in the country, it used not to be an easy matter for us to move about the delta with camels, owing to the frequency with which we had to cross branches of the Helmand and irrigation channels. All our transport animals had been bred in mountainous tracts, and some had come even from the Ghilzai country bordering on the Valley of Ghazni, where none of the poor beasts had seen so much water before in all their lives as they were fated to see in a week in Seistan. It was therefore hardly to be wondered at that our camels showed evident signs of terror when they were confronted with wide expanses of submerged lands, or flowing water.

I had before had experience, when I visited Seistan in 1899, of the difficulty of getting camels to enter the water, or even to trust themselves on the frail looking foot-bridges, which spanned some of the larger irrigation works. On one occasion in particular, when a winter's afternoon was drawing towards evening, a terrified camel delayed the march for over an hour. Although the rest of the caravan had passed over, this one camel steadfastly refused to cross the bridge that spanned a large canal flowing past the outskirts of a flourishing village. Neither coaxing nor stripes had the least effect. The antics of the unnerved beast, and its deafening cries, very soon roused the neighbourhood. Everyone came to see what was happening. The house-tops in the vicinity were crowded

with women and children, while grave elders in long robes were jostled by Kuls who had abandoned their labours in the fields close at hand, their naked bodies splashed with mud from the irrigated lands, and by loafing Sarbazes—soldiers belonging to a neighbouring garrison—in their dingy frock coats and lambskin busbies.

The motley crowd completely filled the exit of the narrow village street, and those who could not see from the ground took up a position on the low garden walls on either hand. Advice was freely offered, and the more energetic of the spectators volunteered to hustle the animal across the bridge. No sooner had it been induced to place its forefeet on the bridge and felt the spring of the tamarisk branches, than all its earlier fears revived. The volunteers closed in and a struggle took place upon the bridge which ended in the animal being pushed over into the canal. For one infinitesimal fraction of time the bottom of the canal was visible as the water was spread in sheets on both its banks. Then, fortunately, the animal scrambled out on the right side of the water, and we were able to resume our interrupted progress.

Owing to the massive proportions of a camel's body before the girth, compared with his lighter quarters, it is necessary to add a counterpoise whenever an animal enters water too deep to be crossed by wading. A man is seated behind the hump, and in this way the beast is able to keep his head above water. Even then, a camel in deep water gets along (one can hardly call it swimming) with a sort of pitching motion. A man swims ahead with the leading rein, while the man on the animal's back encourages

it with a flow of grunts and shouts, directing the animal by splashing water in its face whenever it shows an inclination to swerve.

At the fords the people who worked the "tutins" (long cigar-shaped reed rafts) and the other inhabitants of the neighbourhood used to make a very good thing at first by aiding us to get our unwilling beasts across. In a very short time, however, our own men became so expert that local assistance was only requisitioned at the more difficult fords, where an intimate knowledge of the pitfalls to be avoided was absolutely necessary.



OUR FERRY ON THE RUD-I-SEISTAN, NEAR THE MISSION CAMP.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### ARRIVED AT OUR GOAL.

A fertile country—Band-i-Seistan—Yearly destruction of the weir—A curious irrigation system—Easy cultivation—Game—Nād Ali—Severe cold—Starving inhabitants and our dead transport animals—Willow trees—Remains of an ancient civilization—The river's course through the ruins of Nād Ali—A capricious Princess and the ruin she caused—A brick-built fort—A raid by Turkomans—British military tunics the fashion—Strange gardening—The Khāsh Rud—Chakānsur—A story of violence and bloodshed—Kala-i-Kang—Nothing but a cesspool—The meaning of "Kang."

On the 21st of February, 1903, the day on which the last of our caravan crossed the Helmand, the Mission camp was placed close to a small hamlet named Khwābgāh, the huts of which are situated on the south end of a low, isolated plateau about a mile in length, overlooking the river which flows some thirty feet below it to the west. The country round about is very productive and affords excellent grazing for camels, sheep and cattle, while the river close at hand furnishes a perennial supply of excellent water.

Later on someone claimed to have discovered a very obscure and weak tradition, that once upon a time Rustam, the legendary Prince of Seistan, had passed a night there and, having slept well, had named it Khwābgāh—the place of all others at which to sleep. The name Khwābgāh was accordingly accepted without reserve.

The hamlet occupies one of several detached plateaus

of varying height. Across the river is the main terrace of the dasht, several feet higher than the plateau on which the hamlet of Khwābgāh is situated. From our camp about four hundred yards to the north of the collection of huts, a fairly extensive view could be obtained, and many of the landmarks connected with the geography of the delta were visible. About three miles to the north the fort of Kuhak crowned a low mound, from which it derived its name of "the Fort of the Little Hill." Midway between our camp and this fort was the site of the Band-i-Seistan, a weir that maintains a good head of water in the Rud-i-Seistan canal which takes off immediately above the weir from the left bank of the river. The weir across the stream is a temporary structure which is renewed every year after the floods have destroyed it. During the year previous to our arrival in the country there had been a very severe and general drought, and the Helmand had been dry in its lower course. The people were too impoverished to reconstruct the weir strongly; it had broken down early, and when we were in camp at Khwābgāh its presence could only be detected as the water foamed and broke into great ripples in its passage over the lower portions which were still in place on the floor of the river bed.

About two and a half miles down stream from Kwābgāh, on the right bank of the Helmand, is to be found a collection of huts named Lākari, a smaller place even than Khwābgāh. It is more important, however, than at first sight it appears to be, because it is situated at the head of a ford, one of the best across the Helmand. The river

bed at this place is firm, and affords a good foothold, and as the ford is closed only when the river is at its highest level, it is widely known and well frequented.

The character of the country on the right bank of the Helmand in this part of its course varies very considerably. Along the river bank where the flood waters spread over the land, there is a great deal of vegetation, which increases as the delta is approached. The plateau on which Khwābgāh stands is surrounded with jungle, but across the river the soil in the vicinity of the Kuhak fort is undeniably poor and only capable of affording nourishment to a thick growth of kirt grass.

The Helmand in recent times has flowed to the east of the Khwābgāh plateau, and the old bed of the river can be easily traced. In the present irrigation system there is one very curious feature. A large canal named the Sultāni or Imperial canal, in honour of the Amir of Afghanistan, takes off from the right bank of the Helmand, and flows through the district, but the cultivated lands around Khwābgāh are watered by the tail of another canal which is carried across the Sultāni canal by means of a rude aqueduct formed by an ordinary bridge of tamarisk.

Owing to the nearness of the river and to the presence of the canals, the soil in the Khwābgāh district is never dry. At times many acres of land are flooded, and the jungle is full of miniature swamps. Vegetation is extremely luxuriant and the inhabitants cultivate just as much land as they are able to without trouble to themselves. In no two seasons is the same plot

of land placed under crops. As soon as the fields have been reaped fresh ground is broken, the old cultivated patches become covered with tamarisk, and by the end of the following year one would scarcely know that the land had been under cultivation. The fields are merely clearings in the jungle, unprotected by fences, and open to the ravages of wild beasts or domestic animals. In fact, the crop is all the better for being grazed down, as otherwise the growth would be rank, and, although apparently luxuriant, the plants would be quite unable to support the burden of the ear when the latter matured.

The shallow abandoned bed of the Helmand passes through this tract in a winding course, which is occupied by a smaller growth of tamarisk. When we passed along it the rooting of wild pig and the shrill call of the francolin afforded evidence of the presence of game, and in the glades formed by the windings of the river bed, as well as along the edges of the clearings made by the inhabitants of Khwābgāh, small coveys of black partridge or francolin were fairly numerous.

In its general aspect the country closely resembled parts of the riverain of the Indus below Tatta. Indeed, throughout the riverain of the Helmand and in the Miān Kangi this resemblance was most striking, the vegetation that thrives on their low-lying tracts being almost identical with that to be found along the Indus above Keti Bandar and in the country around Ghorabāri.

On the 1st of March, 1903, the main body of the Mission marched towards Nād Ali, which was reached in two short stages; and after remaining at Khwābgāh for

two or three days longer I followed. The milder weather had given place to severe cold, and rain had also fallen. The long marches which had to be made before we reached the delta, combined with a scarcity of forage, owing to the drought of the preceding summer, had weakened the transport animals, and the fall in the temperature and the rain proved fatal to a large number of camels. There was no possibility of losing the trail of the main camp, as it was clearly marked by the bodies and remains of dead camels.

To the famine-stricken inhabitants of the country the mortality among these animals was a veritable blessing, and no sooner had one fallen than it was surrounded by crowds of starving people, who, for form's sake, cut its throat in order to render the flesh lawful food. The skin was speedily removed, and then the flesh also, and in a very short space of time there remained only the bare skeleton. Fires were lit and a hasty meal made on the spot to assuage the pangs of hunger, after which the flesh was carried off to be dried in the sun and kept for future use. In their brown felt winter cloaks the starving men, who used to gather round the fallen camels, looked, from a distance, like huge vultures; while those birds themselves formed an outer ring and watched with greedy eyes, and loud cries of disappointment, the robbery of their established perquisites. As the people made off, the birds closed in on the bones which they picked clean, aided by jackals whom the scent of blood had lured from the shelter of the tamarisk jungle.

About two and a half miles to the west of Nād Ali we

found a group of well-grown willow trees, which have attained to a height of some thirty feet above ground with trunks fully seven or eight feet in circumference. The existence of trees is a feature that is worthy of mention in Seistan, and these particular specimens were well grown and fully developed. Sheltered while they were young and tender by the surrounding jungle of tamarisk thickets, they had not suffered from the violence of the wind, which deforms any trees that are not protected from its effects, and at the time of our visit they formed a conspicuous landmark, their foliage rising well above the jungle growths in the midst of which they were growing. When we saw them again later in the year their dying foliage was ablaze with rich autumnal tints and introduced a welcome note of colour into the dingy hues of the tamarisk.

From this clump of trees the lofty mounds of Nād Ali are occasionally visible through gaps in the jungle, and as he approaches the mounds the traveller finds increasing evidence that he is in the midst of the remains of an ancient civilisation. Small heaps of baked brick are to be seen in every field, which the husbandman has turned up with his plough. These belong to ruins which are buried now many feet deep. Here and there are low mounds of brick and clay *débris*, remains of ancient buildings, which are easily detected by the coating of nitrous efflorescence which clothes them as if with hoar frost, and this covering contrasts vividly with the sombre colouring of the tamarisk jungle in which the mounds are situated. Some of the latter are used by the agricul-

turists as sites for their own dwellings as they are in this way raised above the damp soil and the reach of floods.

By the natives the ruins of Nād Ali are called the city Kai Khasrau, the third monarch of the Kaiānian race, whom some have identified with Cyrus of the Grecian writers who ascended the throne of Persia about 558 B.C. The descendants of Kai Khasrau still exist in the country, but they have in these times fallen on evil days, and exist in penury and obscurity in the land over which their forefathers ruled as sovereign princes for many centuries.

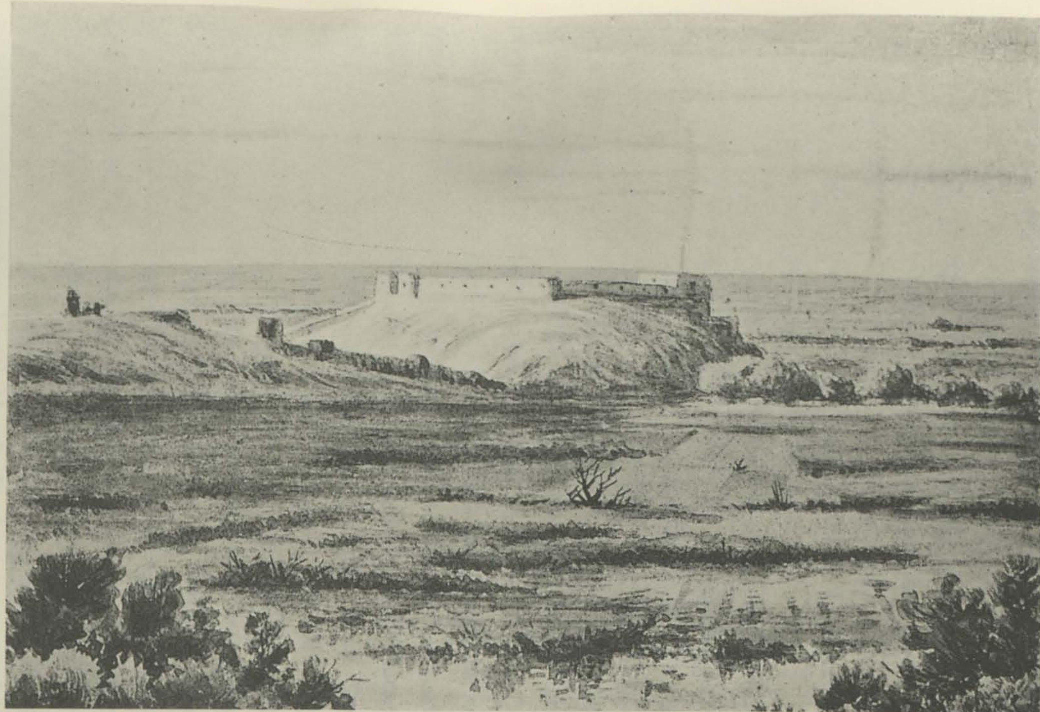
The ruins are situated about six miles below the bifurcation of the Helmand, and about half a mile from the right bank of the Siksar branch of the river. Before the Helmand set in this direction the ruins extended over a much greater area. But when the river sought a course right through the ruins, as it did within the memory of men still living, the sandhills dissolved at the first touch of its waters, and the time-worn fragments of walls were swept away and their foundations buried under an accumulation of silt which before very long forced the river to seek yet another new outlet for its flood waters.

Nor are the forces of Nature the only destructive agency that has been at work. For many years the ruins of Nād Ali have been exploited by an enterprising person who has obtained the monopoly for the manufacture of saltpetre, which is extracted in great quantities from the ancient site. Under the attacks of this person and his agents the ruins are fast disappearing; deep pits are taking the place of tumuli of bricks, and the ruins are

also the quarry from which the people of the country-side obtain building material. It is not astonishing therefore that in the last thirty years the process of destruction has made great strides.

At the time when the Mission was encamped at Nād Ali the only vestige of the past splendour of the inner city, besides the quantities of baked brick and fragments of porcelain and earthenware, was the fragment of one of the minarets of the Cathedral Masjid. It stands now about twenty feet above the *débris* that is strewn round it. The uses it served when intact, and when the building of which it formed a part was thronged with worshippers, are no longer known to the people, who call it the Koshk-i-Dukhtar, or the "Maiden's Bower." It was in fact never anybody's bower, and the worthy mullahs who chanted the call to prayer from its balcony would have been scandalised at the very idea.

The princess whose bower tradition insists was the original of this ruin was celebrated for her beauty and her caprice. At that time it is said the great weir of Rustam was also in existence, and canals fed the country round Nād Ali. The princess was dissatisfied at the allowance of water she received for her flowers and her garden, and pestered her father to pull out several bricks to enlarge the opening in the weir from which she obtained her supply. The doting father weakly consented, until a large opening was made. Yet the wayward lady continued to grumble, when suddenly everything was ended by a very great flood coming down the Helmand. The place where the dam had been weakened gave way



NĀD ALĪ. THE DELTA OF SEISTAN FROM THE TELL OF SURHDIK.

*(From a Drawing by the Author.)*

under the strain and the whole fabric of the weir collapsed. Away went the city, and away went flowers and garden, and the whole of Seistan was flooded and laid waste owing to the caprice of the Malik's daughter and the weakness of that Prince in denying her nothing! This legend of a woman's waywardness proving the ruin of her fatherland is common in many other countries adjoining Seistan, and it may very possibly be founded on the legend of Semiramis and Ninus.

Owing to the depths to which recent deposits have buried what remain of the ruins, the site of Nād Ali provided us with very few relics of ancient days in the shape of coins and seals. Those that were brought into our camp for sale had been discovered in the Sarotār ruins farther to the east, and their numbers were the result of many seasons' diligent search.

Apart from the professional relic-hunters, numbers of persons were eager to dispose not only of coins and seals which they had stored, but other belongings, as all classes had suffered very severely from the famine that had followed the drought of the previous year. In this way old Seistani prayer-carpets, rugs, and saddle-bags, in design, workmanship and finish far superior to those ordinarily made at the present time, were brought into the camp and disposed of there at prices for which similar articles of a very ordinary description could not be purchased six months later. The money thus obtained and that which was distributed in wages for services rendered to the Mission, combined with the flesh of a great number of dead camels, made the advent of the Mission and its

stay in the country very welcome to the natives. The latter flocked to the camp from the districts beyond the Pariun branch of the river, and the environs of the camp were thronged with crowds of Seistanis looking for employment, or with poultry and other articles for sale.

The camp of the Mission was placed at the foot of a line of mounds which were found afterwards to be the remains of the western wall of the minor city of the ancient capital. About 400 yards to the north-east of the camp rose a lofty mound crowned by a modern fortalice built some forty or fifty years ago by Ali Khan, one of the sons of the Sanjarāni chief Ibrahim Khan. The place is named Nād Ali probably after this person. The summit of the mound is about eighty feet from the ground, and on its slopes facing the west there can still be traced the remains of a massive wall which descends to the ruins of a bastion or tower about forty feet in diameter. The fragments of the wall and the tower are all that is left of the ancient fortifications that defended the position, and a good deal of the upper part of the mound is composed of the decomposed materials of buildings.

The modern fort on the summit which is garrisoned by a detachment of Afghan troops is built entirely of well-baked bricks dug out of the mound. It is very nearly square, each side being some two or three hundred feet in length and the corners face the cardinal points of the compass. The walls and towers may be twenty feet in height, and situated on the top of the mound they form a very prominent landmark.

The fort and hamlet constitute the headquarters of a

sub-division of the Chakānsur District which includes within its limits the share of the delta of Seistan which was awarded to Afghanistan by the Commission of 1872. In 1904 the governor of the district, who was also the Afghan Boundary Commissioner—the Akhundzāda—had some thoughts of making Nād Ali his place of residence, and he took some trouble in laying out orchards and gardens in the vicinity. At the time of our visit in 1903 the village consisted merely of a group of squalid hovels, built on the slope of the mound below the south-east curtain of the fort and sheltered by the fort from the force of the north-north-east winds.

We saw the place for the first time in very unfavourable circumstances. The inhabitants of the country showed very plainly, in their emaciated forms, the straits to which they had been reduced by the drought and famine of the previous year. In addition to the failure of the Helmand which caused a grass famine, disease had broken out among the cattle, and it is said that seventy-five per cent. of the latter had died outright, while the remnant that escaped were so reduced and weakened as to be barely fit for work.

The cattle of Seistan have a great reputation in the surrounding country for being hardy, and especially the cows for their milk. Before the Customs regulations came into existence large numbers used to be exported to places as far remote as Sarakhs, Meshed, and Herat. Kandahar was also a good market. Each community of graziers selected the animals intended for the export trade, and the several droves used to be combined and to travel in a

a large mob. Sometimes as many as four or five hundred head of cattle met at the rendezvous, each drove escorted by men fully armed with matchlocks, swords and shields. The drovers formed an effective escort, sometimes numbering from one to two hundred men, and as they were young and able-bodied, and enterprising persons, they were strong enough to defy the ordinary run of brigands, fearing none but the terrible "alamāns" of the Turkomans.

One elderly man who at one time was engaged in this trade, gave me a graphic account of how, when he was a young man, he had been made prisoner by the Turkomans. His people formed part of a community of nomads encamped on the plains of Yazdān, where they had been in the habit of resorting in the spring for many years. Although the shepherds formed a numerous community, yet as they were spread over a fairly large tract of country, dwelling in more or less isolated groups, they were peculiarly exposed to the attack of a small but resolute band acting in concert.

Early one morning at the time of the "false dawn," which precedes the actual approach of daylight, an alamān of four hundred Turkoman horsemen rushed the camp to which my informant belonged. In an instant they were among the tents, sabring all who hurried forth to defend their wives and children and property. The camps in the immediate vicinity shared a similar fate, and the sun rose on a melancholy procession of captives bound in gangs and goaded on by the victors, who used their lances freely. Those who by reason of wounds or infirmities succumbed to fatigue were cast loose and allowed to die of thirst and

exposure. Sheep were killed and eaten by the captors, but their victims had to be content with a morsel of dry bread and any water there might be available at the nightly bivouac.

In spite of their indifference to suffering, the Turkomans could make but slow progress, encumbered as they were with spoil and a numerous train of captives, and this proved the salvation of those captives who survived: for it gave the inhabitants of the country time to assemble. The passes ahead were seized by armed levies and the Turkomans found their retreat barred. They broke through, but it was at the expense of their booty. Every captive and such other property as had been carried off had to be abandoned and even then the passes were not forced without loss to the marauders; and so the brief experience of Ibrahim Khan, the Kashāni, of his captivity in the hands of the Turkoman, was brought to a joyful conclusion.

Ofttimes the poverty of the inhabitants around Nād Ali impels them to seek a livelihood in far distant lands; and among them are to be found men who have travelled as far as Merv in order, as they say, "to fill their bellies." Just after our arrival in the country two young lads set out for Merv, in April, 1903, to seek for a relative who had migrated from Nād Ali some years previously, and of whom no news had found its way back to that place. Their slender stock of provisions and their ragged felt cloaks were carried by a single ass. On foot, or with an occasional ride when overcome with fatigue, they traversed hundreds of miles to their destination, where they had

last heard of their kinsman. He had hired himself out to a wealthy Turkoman, the owner of large flocks of sheep, as a shepherd, and had taken to himself a wife and settled down in the country, herding his master's sheep on the pastures round the modern town of Merv.

These lads on their return were full of the wonders they had seen, and were able to give a connected narrative of the conditions of life in that far-off land. They spoke in awe-struck accents of the "smoke carriage"—the railway. Their kinsman had constrained them to be his guests for two months, and wished them also to take service with him. Home-sickness, however, drew the lads back to their squalid abodes in a hamlet not far from Nād Ali, and accompanied by their faithful ass, now fat and in good condition after his sojourn in the pastures of Merv, they retraced their steps and arrived at their homes safely at the close of September, having completed the return journey in something over a month and a half.

What struck all of us was that the inhabitants of Nād Ali, whether they belonged to the poverty-stricken Baluch, or to the more prosperous Afghan tribesmen settled in the country, nearly all wore secondhand British military tunics. Some of these garments were very ancient, faded and ragged, with perhaps here and there a tell-tale patch where the original colour could be identified. Perhaps a solitary button with the arms of England and an old regimental number upon it still lingered in the wearer's possession, hanging from his neck on an old and very greasy cord. Probably the coat had been bought long before at a moment of fleeting prosperity following

on a very good season or after some well-planned and executed robbery.

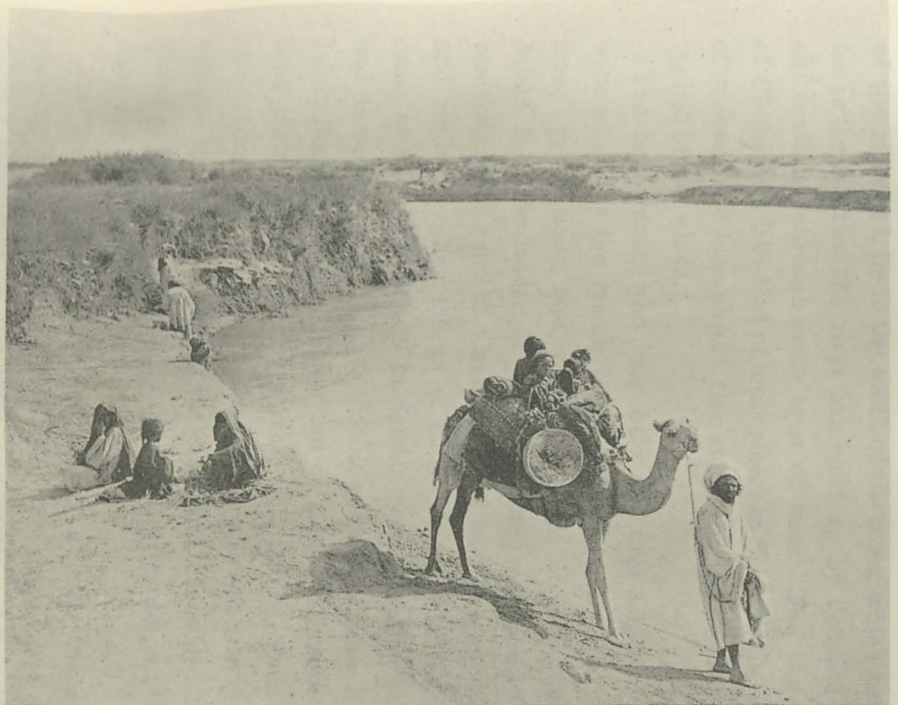
There must be a great trade carried on in cast-off and obsolete uniforms. Great numbers of out-of-date officers' uniforms undoubtedly find a ready sale among the commissioned ranks of the armies of countries adjoining India and Baluchistan, and the tunics of privates are greedily purchased by the population at large. The linesman's red tunic is the favourite, though the dark blue of the artillery runs it close; the former is longer, and to the Asiatic mind a short coat or tunic savours of indecency. The dark rifle green coats of the Baluch battalions of the old Bombay infantry regiments were also by no means rare, and some of the wearers of these possessed properly attested discharge papers.

One of these men produced a basket of vegetables which he had probably obtained from a friend, and as the mess was at that time very short of vegetables, this was the most acceptable offering anyone could have made us. On the strength of his basket of vegetables, when the appointment became vacant this man was permanently installed as head gardener to the British Consulate at Nasratābād. Some time after, as the garden consisted of numerous and deep trenches, more or less damp or containing subsoil water, in which nothing would grow, I asked him if he had had previous experience of gardening. He drew himself up and saluted in a most approved military style. "Sir," said he, "I do just what their lordships tell me to do!" The condition of the garden was sufficiently explained.

Both Afghans and Baluchis wear the British military

tunics, when they possess them, with the rest of their national garments, and the effect is not nearly so incongruous as one might expect it to be. The Afghan or Seistani kullah, a national cap with or without a turban, and the loose blue or white and very voluminous trousers are in a way in keeping with the red tunic and blue jacket, especially when on the person of a tall fellow with an air about him. In the lush green of the jungles and verdure round Nād Ali the red tunics worn by men at work in the fields introduced just the right note of colour to relieve the somewhat sour tones of the rank vegetation.

To the north-east of Nād Ali are situated two great mounds containing the remains of palaces built by the sons of "Leith the Copper Smith," who founded the dynasty of the Maliks of Seistan. From these mounds a very extensive view can be obtained, and for miles around the face of the country is seen to be covered with a dense growth of tamarisk. In the direction of the eastern limit of the Helmand delta the most conspicuous feature in the middle distance is an imposing pile of buildings which represents the town of Chakānsur. This place, the corners of which face the cardinal points of the compass, is surrounded by a mud wall of some height, which in turn is dominated by the "arg" or citadel. Above the citadel rises a tall and slender tower which forms a most effective landmark and gives to the town of Chakānsur, viewed from the larger of the two mounds, a curious resemblance to an ocean tramp or steam collier, the tower appearing like the funnel of the steamer.



A BALUCH FAMILY ABOUT TO CROSS THE HELMAND.

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The town stands upon a low isolated plateau, as upon a pedestal. To this favourable situation it owes its prominence. Both the old and the modern channels of the Khāsh Rud, a feeder of the Seistan Lake independent of the Helmand, lie to the south of the town, which overlooks the fan that the river has built up by deposits of silt continued through many ages of time. The history of Chakānsur, like that of most places in Seistan, is a tale of violence and bloodshed. One story may be related as typical of the whole.

The Sanjarānis, who long held rule over Chakānsur, were originally the vassals of an ancient family who for many generations had been the lords of the place. Jahān Beg, the leader of the Sanjarānis, recognised the position of the ruler of Chakānsur and paid grazing dues and rendered other tokens of subserviency. At last it came to pass that affairs in Seistan went steadily from bad to worse, and in those troublous times a man like Jahān Beg and his son, with a tail of armed followers to back them, became persons worth conciliating. Thus it came about that in course of time a marriage was arranged between the son (who had in the meantime succeeded his father in the lordship of the Sanjarāni immigrants) and the daughter of the lord of Chakānsur.

For the Sanjarāni this was merely a step towards realizing his ambitions, which did not stop short of gaining possession of the town and castle. After the ceremony he prevailed on his father-in-law to allow him to dwell for a time in the fort with his wife. Of course, it was only natural he should like to do so. It was also

only to be expected that having taken up his abode in the fort his clansmen should be allowed access to him on business or to see how he fared. At last an opportunity presented itself. The lord of Chakānsur was taken at a disadvantage and put to death and the castle passed into the hands of the Sanjarāni, and the town also with it. It remained in the possession of the chiefs of this clan till another stronger than they appeared on the scene in the person of an Afghan leader who had been deputed to take it, and Chakānsur passed from the hands of its then ruler, the insane Ibrahim Khan.

On all sides but the west the district of which Chakānsur is the nominal capital is bounded by other native districts; but on the west its limits are important as defining part of the frontier with Persia. Built some centuries ago, the lofty walls and keep of the town are without doubt of good workmanship, but for all its good qualities Chakānsur is no longer the actual seat of government. The importance of the place really dates back to the time when it was the only town in the country to the east of the Helmand lower than the small fortalice of Kadeh. At that time the sub-division of Kang was a swamp, being subject to annual inundations when the channel of Ilamdār was the Helmand. Now this district is well inhabited and full of permanent villages, and a modern fort called Kala-i-Kang is in effect the seat of government, as we found that our old friend the Akhundzāda had built himself a residence close to it.

Kala-i-Kang, or the island fortress, is built on a rise about three hundred yards in diameter, itself formed by

the *débris* of a very ancient town. It is quite a modern structure, and possesses all the defects of modern buildings in Seistan. A square enclosure with sides about three hundred feet long is defended in the usual way. On the south and north sides are two gates over which there are chambers. The ground rises to a height of about ten feet above the general level of the country. On the south the ascent is very gentle, but on the north there is rather an abrupt drop to the ditch which is crossed by a narrow permanent causeway. This ditch surrounds the place, and supplied the materials from which the walls have been constructed. It can be described as nothing less than a great cesspool. The stagnant water is not very shallow, but it is the colour of strong tea, and the banks of the ditch are foul beyond description.

On the 16th of March, 1903, when I rode through the place on my way to Ibrahimābād, it would have been a difficult point to decide which was filthier—the inside or outside of the fort. All round the inside of the walls was a row of stalls for use either as stables or as quarters for the men. The superior officers lived over the gates and in the towers at the corners of the enclosure. The inside of the fort, owing to the salts in the soil on which it stands, was wet and slippery. On all sides there were great heaps of festering stable refuse and litter, and several dirty artificial pools added to the general disreputable air of the place. These pools, like the moat, contained water of the colour of strong tea, with a thick yellow scum on the stagnant surface which the wind had

blown against the leeward bank. From the condition of the margins of these pools it was quite possible to judge of the extent to which their contents must have been polluted. Yet the garrison were using the filthy liquid and were filling vessels with it. The men looked ill, sallow and emaciated, and it was not surprising to hear that Kala-i-Kang was regarded as being unhealthy.

In Seistan the word "Kang" is applied to places which are or have been looked upon as inaccessible. A survival of the old language of the Iranian race, and one of the very few words which have been handed down through a succession of ages to the present time, it possesses a stronger significance than is conveyed by our word "island," by which it is usually translated. In the use of Kala-i-Kang, a little over fifty years ago the mound on which the fort is built was surrounded by the Seistan Lake, which in that corner used to be filled with dense reed-beds. Similarly the district of the Miān Kangi, of which there will be more to be said in the next chapter, derives its name from its situation in the Helmand delta between the two main branches of the river, the Siksar and the Rud-i-Pariun, in consequence of which when the river is in flood it is for weeks cut off from the mainland and rendered practicably inaccessible.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE ALSATIA OF SEISTAN.

Survey work with a small party—Cross into Persia—The Seistani mattock—Deh Dost Muhammad—Changes brought about by the Helmand—A mound of great antiquity—A dense growth of tamarisk bushes—Timely growth of green food—Takht-i-Shah—Surprise visit by Sir Henry McMahon—An undesirable guest and his strange story—Summoned to a conference—A token of friendship—Pleasant greetings—How the wild pig was hunted—The rising Helmand—Return from the Miān Kangi—Cross the Pariun—A dilemma and a timely hint—An area liable to floods—The importance of reclamation works—Devastation caused by the annual rise of the Helmand—A princely debauchee—The Alsatia of Seistan—Yakub the Brigand.

Much of the information embodied in the previous chapter was obtained while I was engaged in survey work with a small party, separated from the main body of the Mission. It was in pursuit of such work that my first visit to the Miān Kangi was undertaken, in the early weeks of our stay in Seiṣtan. As companion on this occasion I had Major Wanliss, of the Intelligence Department, a very capable officer and good friend.

After our inspection of the unsavoury fortress at Kala-i-Kang we passed on to Ibrahimābād, now an insignificant ruin, close to the scene of the murder of Dr. Forbes by Ibrahim Khan in 1841. From this point we turned west and halted at Deh Bahlol, a flourishing Afghan village near the Siksar branch of the Helmand, which since Sir Frederick Goldsmid's award had generally been regarded as the boundary between Afghan and Persian territory.

It was on the 21st March, 1903, that we broke up our camp at Deh Bahlol and crossed the Siksar into Persian territory. Our destination that day was the village of Deh Dost Muhammad, where there was a shopkeeper, we had been told, whom we wished to interview in order to obtain supplies for some of our party. At this distance from the bifurcation of the Helmand the Siksar branch of the river had dwindled to a wide ditch at the bottom of which there was a little stagnant water and deep ooze. It was a nasty obstacle for our camels, but tamarisk grew all around in great profusion, and we tore off branches and cast them into the channel and very soon made it practicable for our transport animals. As for ourselves, the Berthon boat, which Sir Henry McMahon had very kindly put at our disposal, enabled us to cross the shallow water without getting covered with mud.

On this occasion we saw for the first time what a Seistani could do with his mattock, or "tesha." How useful this implement could be in cutting up a dead camel had been abundantly proved, and now we saw with what ease the men could cut down tamarisk bushes with it. The Fārsiwān, who form the agricultural population, rarely or never use any other implement. It serves as an axe and is used as such, except where it is necessary to fell a large tree such as a mulberry or a willow. The Seistani mattock has a larger and heavier blade than the Indian implement, and is put to uses that would soon ruin the latter.

Even in a small detail like this, racial peculiarities are very noticeable. The Afghan cultivator wears boots and

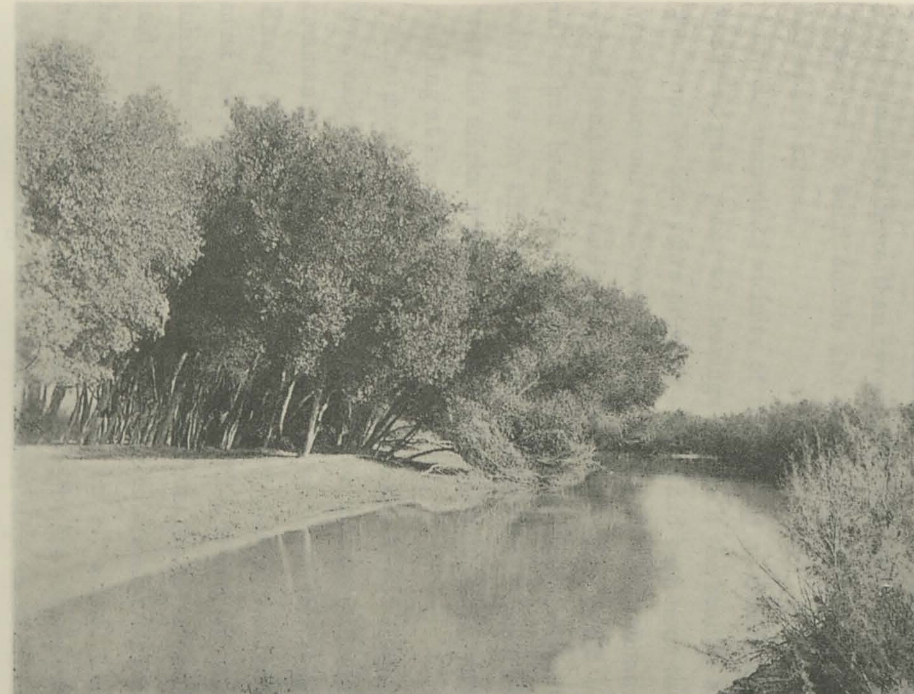
uses a spade in European fashion. The Fārsiwān as a rule uses nothing but a mattock, and generally works barefooted, wearing boots or shoes only when going to or from his work.

We arrived at Deh Dost Muhammad just in time to pitch our camp and get under shelter from a blizzard that raged for the remainder of the day. We were enveloped in clouds of dust, and the temperature fell rapidly.

The village is an interesting illustration of the changes which are continually modifying the geography of Seistan. It has grown out of a small settlement of Sārunis, a numerous tribe of which Dost Muhammad is the head. The Sārunis own considerable herds of cattle, and with the exception of a few of the leading men follow the profession of graziers. When they settled on the site of the present village some thirty years before our visit, the "naizār," or fringe of reed-beds round the delta, stretched to a point quite close to the settlement. But when the main body of water coming down the Helmand sought a new course to the west, and deserted the Siksar channel for the Rud-i-Pariun, the reed-beds which had formed round the mouth of the Siksar shrank in size; the area of dry land increased, and swampy ground which had been used for grazing purposes was taken up for cultivation. As the need for irrigation grew more urgent, canals were dug, and in course of time they drew off almost all the water that entered the Siksar. Then again in course of time it became necessary to maintain the Siksar in working order by artificial means, and it was reduced to its present condition.

The village of Deh Dost Muhammad is built on a fine canal which takes off from a point close to Nād Ali, and as the changes which have been described took place the village grew and became the abode of an agricultural population, while the graziers were driven nearer to the lake. Whether at Deh Dost Muhammad or elsewhere, however, only a fraction of the rich virgin soil exposed by the shrinking of the lake-area in the neighbourhood of the Siksar was actually placed under cultivation. As previously explained the inhabitants of Seistan are content in such matters to live from hand to mouth, laying under tribute as much land as they can easily manage, and when its first rich fertility is exhausted taking up some other plot. In this case the tamarisk quickly gained a footing on the land not actually occupied, and before very long the newly-exposed area was covered with the dense jungle which is characteristic of the Miān Kangi.

Before leaving Deh Dost Muhammad we visited the famous site of Kārkuieh—Kārku Shah as it is called. The country in between is impassable by horsemen, and we had to force our way on foot through a dense growth of tamarisk, intersected by ancient and long abandoned channels in which the Helmand had flowed some forty years ago, as well as by several irrigation channels. The latter were troublesome for they all contained water, and a diligent search had to be made for places where they were narrow enough to be jumped. The old river-beds were both wide and shallow, having been silted up in the course of time, and very frequently we were only aware of



WILLOW GROVE AT ZIĀRAT-I-GHAUS, ON THE SHELA CHARKH CANAL.
(Close to Nād Ali).

the nature of the gently sloping hollows from the faint traces of a bank on one side or the other. These channels were full of giant tamarisk, great thickets composed of long rods and branches, some of which must have measured more than twenty feet, and often we were compelled to bend double and creep through almost on hands and knees.

In the immediate vicinity of the mound of Kārku, the tamarisk gave place to clearings in which the stubble of the crops of two years previous—there had been none the year before our visit owing to the failure of the Helmand—had completely disappeared. Everything that could be eaten had been devoured by the starving cattle, and we could see on the branches and trunks of the tamarisk trees the marks which had been left by their teeth when nibbling at the bark.

The mound of Kārku is of considerable size. It rises to a height of some thirty feet above the ground and commands an extensive view of the whole of the Miān Kangi district. We saw at the first glance that this must be a site of great antiquity. The efforts of the inhabitants to extract baked bricks from the mound had laid bare the foundations of an ancient edifice and broken bricks of vast size were lying about on all sides. The highest part of the mound was formed by the remains of an ancient building, and on the eastern slope there stood a collection of very modern Seistani dwellings, of which fully half-a-dozen fairly large residences had been built entirely with ancient bricks extracted from the mound on

which the hamlet stands. The excavations thus made had been utilised as dust-bins and were partially filled by the sweepings of the huts and old stable litter, and adorned by the carcases of a dead cat or two.

Fortunately the afternoon was fine, and we got the full benefit of the top of the mound as a view point. As far as the eye could reach there was spread out below us a great expanse of tamarisk jungle, the usually sombre hues of which were relieved by great masses of subdued greens and purples where the young spines and the unfolding blossoms were making their appearance. To the south-east could be seen rising above the jungle the modern fortalice of Nād Ali, and to the south, parts of the ruins of Zāhidān. Further towards the south-west were visible the striking ruins which misled Christie into describing them as "those of the ancient site of the city of Dushak." Behind these again were visible the faint steely blue outlines of the Palangān Kuh, more than a hundred miles distant.

To the west, rising clear of the feathery summits of the tamarisk, appeared the mound of Kohlak, and on the summit could be distinctly seen the fragments of walls. Beyond that mound the hills towards Neh and Bandān were clearly visible against the western sky, and beyond these again, standing out against the pale horizon, were the heaving outlines of still loftier ranges, culminating in the table-topped summit named the Kala-i-Dukhtar—the "Maiden's Fort." These were parts of the western face of the higher plateau which the route to Birjand from Seistan

traverses, and at this time of the year the presence of snow on the heights could be recognised by a faint gleam wherever the sun's rays were reflected from their slopes. In the north-west a series of clearings were visible, opening into one another by narrow passages in the jungle, and in them several collections of huts.

So thick and tall were the jungle growths that except in this direction all traces of human dwellings were completely hidden. For all that we knew or could see to the contrary, the village of Deh Dost Muhammad where our little camp was placed might well have been the nearest place of human habitation. But as the day wore on, and the time for preparing the evening meal approached, thin columns of smoke rising from the jungle showed that the country was not so deserted as it seemed. Towards Nād Ali these columns of smoke were very numerous and soon formed a thick haze which almost concealed the fort from view. In this direction we imagined there to be a very numerous population, and this inference was afterwards found to be fully justified.

Two days later, on the 24th of March, we arrived at Takht-i-Shah, where temporary quarters had been established by a party of Sakzais, men from Afghan territory, north of the lake area, who had crossed into the Miān Kangi when they heard that fresh shoots were springing up in the great reed-beds of Beringak. All their cattle had been sent in that direction, and scouts were out also in the Hāmun-i-Puza, which was beginning to fill with water from the Khāsh River. In short, wherever there was a chance

of obtaining a mouthful of green food, men were out prospecting. While we were at Takht-i-Shah it was a matter of daily occurrence for men to be seen returning from the Hāmun or lake basin with loads of succulent green fodder, and with the good news of the new growth of reeds. By means of these loads of fresh green food the lives were saved of very many valuable animals, which were enabled to regain strength enough to drag themselves painfully into the pastures where food was by this time assured, thanks to the water which we could now see was day by day covering more of the lake floor.

At Takht-i-Shah we were paid a surprise visit by Sir Henry McMahon, who followed our work for a day or two and then left us again to our own devices. Almost immediately afterwards, on the 28th March, Wanliss and I also left Takht-i-Shah for Burj-i-Mirgul, and as our path lay along rising ground we reached our destination with much less hindrance than we had experienced in the jungle.

By this time the strength of our party had been increased by a guest whom we had tried in vain to lose. At Deh Dost Muhammad, a harmless lunatic attached himself to our small party and followed us about the country. He was rather a celebrity in his way, and his history was well known and a sad one. His mania fortunately did not take a religious bent, or he might have been an intolerable nuisance and a source of danger. In his more lucid moments he proved himself to be extensively read in the classic authors of Persia, and in addition he possessed a considerable knowledge of Persian folklore; but every-

thing was so refracted in his mind by reason of his shattered intellect that it was impossible to connect the scraps of information which he let fall.

Mir Gul, we gathered, was a member of a well-to-do family in Seistan, and with his brothers had held a share of the property bequeathed by their father. After his father's death he had given himself up to literature and metaphysical disputations to the prejudice of his affairs. He seems to have been a man of a careless and pleasure-loving temperament, not very strong-minded perhaps and quite without ambition. The division of the family property and the succession of Mir Gul to his father's position are said to have excited the jealousy of his younger brother, who at last made up his mind to remove Mir Gul from his path. A plot was laid not against Mir Gul's life but against his reason, which the younger brother is credited with destroying by a potion composed of the sweat of a camel. Whatever the cause, the mind of the wretched man became unhinged to such an extent that he abandoned his home and his family and wandered about the country in a half-naked condition, subsisting on what the people gave him in the way of food.

Arak-i-Shutar (camel sweat) is the name given to the oily substance that exudes at the nape of a camel's neck. The shaggy mane of a camel is frequently soaked and matted with this substance which seems to issue from two places on either side of the spine. This oily substance or discharge is more abundant at certain times than at others, notably in the winter when the rutting season comes round. All

camels seem to emit this substance, but it is more plentiful in the male than in the female. The matter has a rank and offensive odour, and when plentiful it stains the driving reins. It is popularly regarded as a most certain poison, not immediately fatal to life, but destructive of the reason when administered in food or drink, and in time affecting injuriously the bodily health of the victim.

Burj-i-Mirgul, where we arrived on the 24th of March, is one of the four villages that may be said to be all that exist in the Miān Kangi, the other habitations being merely temporary collections of wattle-and-daub huts. Deh Dost Muhammad is the chief village in importance, and next come Siahdak, because it is there that the chief of the Sanjarānis has received a small grant of land. At Burj-i-Mirgul, at a little distance from the fort, we found two or three gardens enclosed within high walls, and it was well that these walls were available for shelter, as soon after we arrived the wind developed into a raging blizzard. Fortunately fuel was plentiful, and we made ourselves as comfortable as possible in the circumstances.

At about 10 o'clock the next morning a shivering messenger handed me a note from Sir Henry McMahon summoning us to a conference, and Wanliss and I accordingly walked across to a small hamlet which had been fixed on as the rendezvous. It was too cold to ride. On our way we passed through several hamlets which to all appearances had been deserted by the inhabitants. Each hut had its entrance closed. A few dishevelled fowls clucked and scratched among the refuse heaps between the

huts; and a few snarling and emaciated dogs bared their teeth at us, from their lairs in hollows among the dung-hills. Only an occasional film of smoke, issuing from the closed entrances of the huts, denoted the fact that the latter were not untenanted.

At length we reached the rendezvous and found our chief and another officer inside one of the wattle-and-daub huts. These huts look a good deal worse than they are, and we were able to make ourselves fairly comfortable inside. After lunch we again sallied forth, and spent the afternoon in riding at as rapid a rate as possible among tamarisk brushwood, the only advantage being that in the shelter of the latter we were protected to a great extent from dust and the incessant buffeting of the wind. It was almost evening when we separated and Wanliss and I returned on foot to camp at Burj-i-Mirgul in the teeth of a fairly strong gale. The same night the wife of the Kad Khuda, or chief man of the village, sent us a present of some cakes of white and carefully ground flour which had been prepared for our especial benefit. They were a welcome change from the unleavened bread on which we had been compelled to live; and we were the more gratified because it was the first token of good feeling we had received from the local population.

The next day we continued at Burj-i-Mirgul, and as the wind abated in the afternoon we paid a visit to the Kad Khuda Sher Muhammad, who had called on us upon our first arrival at his village. He and his brethren were very civil-spoken old gentlemen and they made us very welcome

in their fort. This was the first time we had met any men belonging to this class and we were very agreeably impressed with their pleasant manners and intelligence. Sher Muhammad and his brethren were quite willing to talk about their country and its affairs, and showed none of the suspicion which had greeted us in other places. They told us where we ought to cross the Pariun and recommended us to avoid the Margo ferry and to go by way of Malaki, where three or four "tutins," or rafts of bulrushes, were always maintained at the water's edge for the use of wayfarers.

Siāhdak, to which we removed from Burj-i-Mirgul was a village of a different character, with dwellings of the wattle-and-daub order. A fine canal passes through the village and on its banks there is a line of young willow trees, well grown in all respects, but bent away from the prevailing wind. Except under exceptional circumstances it is impossible for trees to grow upright, so great is the force of the wind. The population of Siāhdak is composed almost entirely of Baluchis, and their presence is manifested in the untidy appearance of the village. No sooner had we arrived in the place than we were greeted by one of the Baluch inhabitants who had lived for many years in Quetta, where he had served an officer well-known in the province. During our stay this man hung about the camp and made himself useful in a great many ways.

Among other things he told us that at one time the jungles in the Miān Kangi, as well as the reed-beds of the Lake, used to swarm with wild pig. This is confirmed

by Conolly, who mentions having seen in a small history of Seistan, by a native of the country, that when a piece of land was put under cultivation the husbandman calculated on losing half the produce by their ravages. We were told that in parts of the swamps wild pig were at one time so numerous that people were afraid to go near.

Although the boar is unclean, yet the Baluchis say that he is a stout "kāfir" whom it is allowable to slay. There the permission ends. The carcase of the slain animal is allowed to rot where it falls. If dogs have been used in the chase, they are permitted to gorge themselves on the flesh. At Siāhdak we gathered from our informant some particulars of the manner in which the Seistani Baluch hunt the wild pig. The Seiāds or professional hunters own a great number of dogs (Conolly describes them as resembling the Bhil dogs of India) which are followed on the hunt by a crowd of men, some armed with matchlocks, antiquated pistols, or swords, and others only with sticks. Sometimes when the ground is favourable men with firearms are placed in ambush, and the pigs are driven past them; at others the sportsmen beat the jungle in a body with their pack of dogs. Occasionally a running fight is kept up for a long distance, and if a fierce old boar is being tracked he may do a good deal of damage both to man and dogs before a lucky shot puts an end to the struggle. To have slain a large boar is accounted a feat to be proud of, as the arms used are generally very crude, and the ammunition is very much home-made.

The jungles around Siāhdak used to be a very favourite

resort for hunting parties as there were not many hamlets close to it. But when I gave our friend orders to set up a hunt for our benefit he told us it was impossible, not only because there were no dogs available, but because there was no longer any game. When the Helmand failed in 1902, the disease that attacked the cattle was communicated to the wild pig, and the latter died in hundreds from disease, combined with lack of food and water. There was no doubt about the scarcity of boars at the time of our visit, and if the statements of the inhabitants as to the way in which these animals used to over-run the country had not been confirmed by Conolly, it would have been impossible to credit them, as in all our period of residence in the country we only met with five or six wild pig.

As by this time—the end of March—the Helmand was rising fast and the main camp of the Mission had taken up its position on the terrace of the dasht, we felt it to be unwise to delay much longer in the Miān Kangi, as there was every prospect if we did so of our being cut off from the rest of the party. Accordingly we broke up our camp at Siāhdak on the 3rd of April and marched to the western branch of the river.

At first we experienced no difficulty; though the irrigation cuttings were full, the land between them was dry. But about three miles beyond Siāhdak we arrived on the outskirts of the area which is submerged by the annual floods. At the small hamlet of Maliki we found ourselves on the bank of a well-defined natural stream of water the crossing of which was accomplished fairly easily. Beyond

this, however, the thickets of tamarisk and the damp ground showed us that it would be a task of no little magnitude to reach the opposite bank. As we advanced our difficulties increased, and we very soon came to a patch of cultivated ground, most inadequately defended by a small protective embankment, on the very edge of the submerged tract.

By dint of good rates of payment and much patience and determination, we had been able to secure the services of about thirty to forty men to help our laden camels across the tract covered with water, and we were in this way enabled to lighten the burdens of all our camels very materially and relieve the more feeble animals of all but nominal loads. The patch of cultivation was a most suitable point at which to readjust the loads, and after about an hour's delay we made a fresh start in good trim for the struggle before us. For about two miles we wound in and out between partially submerged tamarisk thickets, all the time in water, though of very varying depths. Suddenly, as we splashed across an island over which the water was comparatively shallow, we found ourselves on the edge of the main channel of the Pariun, which at first sight seemed to be fully a mile wide, though afterwards we found it to be a good deal less.

This wide expanse of clean water setting towards the Hāmun with a current which we estimated to be about one and a half miles an hour was at the first glance calculated to damp our spirits, but it had to be crossed and we set ourselves to do it. We had been told that a ferry had

been established at this point for the convenience of local traffic, and we endeavoured to find the rafts or "tutins" and the Seiāds who manned them. The "tutins" we discovered moored at the opposite bank, which was not very reassuring. Before, however, we could do anything at all it was necessary to unload the camels and turn them loose to graze as the only means of quieting the uproar caused by wrangling camel men and their screaming animals. Then came the task of settling with the men we had engaged to help us, who had covenanted to bring our effects to the ferry and no farther. When we had discharged those who were going back, and had unloaded our goods on the brink of the stream, we finished our breakfast, and after that began to break up the loads into others of more manageable sizes which could be ferried across without risk of overloading our small Berthon boat or the "tutins" when they arrived.

As the day wore on we were joined by parties of casual travellers, Kad Khudas on their way to Nasratābād on business with the Governor, and others who had business of their own in the villages beyond the Pariun. These got across the river in safety, but the ferry-men, whose temporary camp we had discovered among the tamarisk bushes, made no move to help our party, notwithstanding our polite requests, backed by an assurance of payment and by an exhibition of the money itself. We were in a quandary. The island on which we stood was barely an inch or two above water level when we arrived in the morning, and although the river had fallen some two or

three inches while we waited on the brink, yet a sudden rise would have swamped our bivouac and made retreat into the Miān Kangi most difficult.

In the midst of our doubt we received a hint from one of the Kad Khudas who had crossed from the opposite side and had entered into conversation with us. This person advised us to lose no time in getting over the Pariun, since at that season of the year a sudden fall in the river was certain to be followed by a very much greater rise, and moreover there was a good deal of water out on the opposite side of the main stream. On our telling him of the difficulty we were placed in, and how our requests were slighted by the Seiāds who plied their rafts before our eyes and seemed to enjoy our plight, the good Kad Khuda smiled, and said that from time immemorial the only methods that great monarchs had ever found to answer with the stubborn Seistani were summary in their operation, and that the people of Seistan now appreciated no other methods. We understood at last what course we should have to adopt if we wished to cross the Pariun that afternoon. But we deferred our simulated fury till our friend the Kad Khuda had mounted his pony and had disappeared into the jungle, through which we could hear him splashing on his way home.

The men of the camel corps, whose camels formed our transport, were armed with broad and heavy cutlasses of a most formidable appearance. After the Kad Khuda had departed we bade half-a-dozen of these men draw their weapons, and with this display of force made a most

dramatic arrest among the Seiāds. Our acting was so good, and its effects so satisfactory, that within a quarter of an hour four fresh rafts were afloat, and our loads were being placed on them and in the Berthon boat preparatory to being ferried across. There were still remaining some hours of daylight, and as our anxieties had been relieved, we were at liberty to examine our surroundings in a more appreciative mood than had been possible earlier in the day.

On either side of our halting-place were large islands, now partially submerged, between which narrow, winding lanes of clear flowing water were bounded on either side by a dense growth of rods of the young tamarisk, looking like great beds of osiers. The expanse of shallow water in front was relieved by the platforms used by the Seiāds from which they fished with lines and nets, and a row of their stakes extended for some two hundred yards or so up to the edge of the deep-water channel. The further shore was wooded with tamarisk, beyond which the undulating lines of high sand dunes gave distinction to the scene and formed an effective background. Slightly to our right front a ruined tower rose above the tamarisk for a height of about fifteen feet, and near it were fragments of ruined walls peeping through the jungle. This tower and the adjoining ruins marked the site of the township of Daki, which was a prosperous little settlement before the set of the river had made the stream which we were about to cross the main branch of the Helmand.

No mishaps occurred during the crossing. Six camels

and two men were swept down by the stream and for a short time it appeared as if they would be lost, but fortunately the current set towards the submerged island on which the ruins of Daki remained, and once the more shallow part of the stream was reached both the men and their camels regained their footing and were guided to our camp on the off bank by one of the very Seiāds who had at first proved refractory. These men now worked with a will and all our effects and animals were across the main river by nightfall. When the last raft-load had been crossed we assembled the Seiāds and paid them personally in good money, adding a small present to each for the zeal they had displayed. We parted the best of friends, and we could hear the men congratulating themselves on their good day's work as they punted their rafts home across the waters. It was a novel experience for them to find that they received their wages without any part of it being sweated by middlemen, and they were properly astonished and delighted by this unheard-of procedure.

The rise in the river predicted by our good friend the Kad Khuda took place during the night, and the next morning we found a stream of water fully four hundred yards wide between our camp and the main land, the water reaching to within a few feet of our tents. There were no "tutins" available for the second crossing; and we decided to push on before a further rise in the river took place. We now reaped the fruits of our deliberate movement in the Miān Kangi, as our camels had been able to recover condition to a considerable extent. Although

at one part of the second crossing the water was so deep that the loads were partially under water, all our camels passed through without a mishap, and we once more formed up our baggage train on dry ground with the satisfaction of knowing that there were now no obstacles to be surmounted on our way to the main camp which could at all compare with the passage of the Rud-i-Pariun.

We had reached the western shores of this branch of the Helmand, under the lofty sand dunes seen from the other side, at a point close to the deserted hamlet of Deh Khānam. Here our small party broke up, Major Wanliss returning direct to the main camp, while I delayed a little longer for the purpose of visiting and exploring the remains of Zāhidān, the mediæval capital of Seistan. But before quitting the Miān Kangi for good it will be interesting to supplement the description of the district on one or two points.

The greater part of the Miān Kangi is liable to inundation every year as soon as the river rises, and in the neighbourhood of the branches of the Helmand, large areas are under water at that time. After the floods have subsided, and the water has evaporated, a great many varieties of tender grasses make their appearance on the lately flooded land, and then the glades in the tamarisk jungle are adorned with a carpet of verdure. In places the flood waters make their way into old and deserted channels, with which the surface of the Miān Kangi is scarred. When the pools thus formed are not deep they soon dry up, even under the shade of the tamarisk. In



"TUTINS" ON THE PARIUN.

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the deeper channels, however, especially where canals are near at hand and the flood water is reinforced by canal water that flows into it through leaky embankments, it collects and forms the most lovely pools, their surfaces broken with jungle-clad islets and diversified by the bends of the channel in which they have formed.

Nor is the jungle itself without its beauties, though the perspiring traveller, who has to force his way through its tangled thickets, is not perhaps always in the humour to appreciate them. The tamarisk, it must be admitted, is not one of the most attractive forms of vegetation, but to us it afforded a pleasant contrast to the monotonous treeless valley of the Middle Helmand. In the spring, when I first visited the Miān Kangi, the tamarisk shows to best advantage, throwing out new foliage and blossoming with masses of dark purple and red flowers. At this time of the year, especially when the sun is low and the thickets are outlined by broad masses of light and shade, and when the vistas in the winding reaches of some long abandoned river-bed or in the clearings round the settlements are filled with the mists of evening, many unexpectedly rich and agreeable colour effects are frequently seen.

The larger canals that pass through the jungle flow with a sluggish current, protected all day, even in summer, by the overhanging boughs of the tall bushes that flourish on their banks. In winter the water freezes hard and ice lies at the roots of the jungle plants long after it has melted in more open situations.

In its economic relations, the striking feature about the

Miān Kangi is the absence of systematic attempts to save it from the encroachments of the river during the season of floods. Here and there short lengths of protective embankments exist which have usually been the work of the people of the township on whose lands they stand. The soil is a very light sandy loam, and embankments, unless strengthened or largely composed of fascines of tamarisk, would not be able to resist the action of the water. The only protective embankment which is maintained by the Government is at the north-western extremity of the Miān Kangi, where land has been gradually reclaimed by means of embankments which have been constructed during the season of low water. According to local accounts this work of land reclamation was initiated by Sardar Sharif Khan, and since his rebellion and the confiscation of his land grants in or about 1896 it has been continued by the Deputy Governor. The embankment, on which the prosperity and value of the property depends, is carefully repaired every spring, the various townships contributing each its quota of labourers, or maintaining the length of embankment within its limits in thorough repair.

The high importance of works of this character is at once apparent when the river rises. Then, as one walks along the summit of the embankment, there is seen on the side of the river a wide expanse of water and tall reed-beds, and on the other side rich dry land under cultivation, dotted with flourishing hamlets stretching close up to the embankment. From the face of the waters rise here and

there, like islands above the reed-beds, mounds of *débris* which show that at one time the flooded area must have been fairly well populated. Nor was that time so very long ago. Just as, in the eastern half of the Miān Kangi, land which used to be flooded and waste has been brought within the cultivable area by the shrinking of the Siksar branch of the Helmand, so the transference of the main volume of flood water to the Rud-i-Pariun has desolated on the western side of the Miān Kangi an area of something like a hundred square miles.

Here was situated at the beginning of the nineteenth century some of the richest land in Seistan. In 1810 when Christie passed through the country, crops of wheat and barley were raised there, and the grain was exported to Herat. Now it is full of melancholy remains of walls and buildings; and more sad than these, the vestiges of the great vineyards and orchards, for which Jallalābād used to be famous. Devastated by the annual rise of the Helmand, the vines have long since been destroyed, but here and there stand specimens of the mulberry, whose hard wood has resisted the action of both wind and water, and whose trunks record the levels reached by the floods at various times during the past ten years—the period in which the Pariun has developed to its present size. Alkali bush and camel thorn have usurped the places of vines and pomegranates, and the fields once clad with waving crops are now covered with thickets of the rapidly growing tamarisk.

The lands thus desolated by the annual inundations of

the Pariun formed the personal appanage of Malik Jallalúdin Khan, the last of the princely family which for centuries gave rulers to Seistan. It was after him that Jallalābād—now a pile of crumbling ruins—was named. He was the last of his race who had any pretensions to be considered a ruling chief—and that only for a very brief period. A British officer who saw him in Herat in 1838 has stated that this descendant of an illustrious family was a man so well endowed with those outward qualities which compel admiration that when he passed through the main street of the city the people who thronged it put aside their business to watch him go by. Unfortunately he was a debauchee and a voluptuary, destitute of all the greater qualities which make a successful ruler, and his downfall was complete. The halls in which Malik Jallalúdin Khan, the unworthy descendant of the Chosroes of ancient Persia, held his revels surrounded by his light-o'-loves and his favourites are now given over to bats and owls. Their supremacy is disputed and their security disturbed only by the ghoulish, naked forms of those men who exploit the ruins for saltpetre when the subsidence of the water renders the place accessible.

The flooded area forms a marked division between the part of Seistan where there are permanent villages and the Miān Kangi, where with a few exceptions there are only temporary collections of huts. As already noted, the name Miān Kangi* indicates that during periods of high river

* The middle island, *i.e.*, between the two branches of the Helmand.

the tract between the Siksar and the Pariun is inaccessible, and owing to this circumstance it has until lately been regarded as the Alsatia of Seistan. In 1899 when I first entered Seistan the inhabitants of the villages of the Shahristan spoke of the Miān Kangi and the area flooded by the Pariun with bated breath. For anyone to move into the Miān Kangi and to live there was a sign of having gone utterly to the bad. To cross from the villages west of the Pariun into the Miān Kangi, except in parties strong enough to repel attack, was a dangerous undertaking. Nor did the broken and desperate men who sheltered in the thickets of the Pariun confine themselves to robbing those who were compelled to pass through this tract. They openly levied blackmail on the neighbouring communities and were ready to sell their services to anyone who had a grudge against a rival or an old score to discharge.

Sometimes, however, matters did not turn out in the way they expected, and the career of the evil-doer reached an abrupt and violent termination. There lived in the Pariun a certain man Yakub, a Sasuli by tribe, who used to be spoken of all over Seistan as Yakub the Brigand. He was believed to enjoy the advantage of being protected by a personage in Seistan to whom on occasions he had proved a very useful tool. Yakub's patron was at enmity with the late Nārui Sardār Said Khan, and to such lengths did the dispute go that the Nārui Sardar carried his grievances to Meshed and talked of going yet further.

At this time Yakub appeared openly as the possessor of a ruined enclosure and a few huts on the western edge of

the Pariun area. With an utterly inexcusable absence of reserve he used to boast that these possessions had been bestowed on him as the price of removing Said Khan, to which end he was going to devote his time and energies. Now Said Khan dwelt not far off on the opposite edge of the Pariun area, at a small hamlet named Milak, which was conveniently situated with respect to Afghan territory. Only a strip of jungle about five miles wide and two or three channels of the Pariun separated Yakub from his intended victim, and the brigand's loose tongue and over-confidence in his own prowess proved his undoing.

Said Khan had a very clear idea of the course to be pursued, but as he was advanced in years he made over to his eldest son the active part in dealing with the imprudent Yakub. The son laid his plans well—and he did not talk. One night, attended by a band of trusty partisans, he made his way through the jungle and across the Pariun by the light of a waning moon and surrounded Yakub's dwellings. Having carefully posted his men, he opened fire at daybreak on the tents and huts which sheltered his enemy. The latter replied and for a time a brisk fusillade was kept up on both sides. If all the stories in circulation are true, the women of Yakub's party took an active share in the defence and proved worthy partners of the outlaws by the courage they displayed. But by the time the sun rose all was over. Yakub and his associates were either dead or dying, and it is said that only one or two children escaped.

With the death of Yakub, who was a ruffian of a very

dangerous type, a change came about in the Miān Kangi. The other persons of his profession who still lurked among the thickets of the Pariun began to consider whether the risks of their profession were not greater than its doubtful rewards, and there was a marked improvement on the lawless conditions which had previously prevailed.

Of the village life in the country west of the Pariun, some account will be given in a later chapter. Here, however, a word may be said about the prospects of any further diversion of the waters of the Helmand in this direction. Like the Miān Kangi, the tract to the west is largely composed of very recent deposits of alluvial soil. In the midst of these there are inclusions of an older formation and harder material which form low plateaus, very little raised above the recent deposits, but yet sufficiently so to be above the reach of water. These plateaus are not commanded by the modern canal system of Seistan. Their summits are almost destitute of vegetation, and the ivory-white colour of the soil is in strong contrast with the verdure that everywhere clothes the land which water nourishes. The long and narrow plateau on which the ruins of Zāhidān are situated is the most important and pronounced. It rises gently from the west to drop more steeply to the east, and offers the only obstacle there is in the country to the westward set of the Helmand. Any further development in this direction can only take place if the river turns the southern end of the plateau.

# CHAPTER X.

## THE WIND OF 120 DAYS.

Life in Seistan compared to residence in a museum—Work of the Mission—Mixed character of inhabitants—"Bad-i-sad-o-bist-roz," or the famous "Wind of 120 Days"—Its distribution and character—Destructive effects—A natural sand blast—Rifts torn in plateaus—Compelled to take refuge in the Consulate—Extremes—Direction and velocity—Signs of its approach Personal comfort The "Smoke of Seistan"—Falls of Snow—Seistan fly and its attack on human beings and cattle—Heavy mortality among our transport—Cautery and the camel—A fatal journey—Heroism rewarded—Deaths from drowning.

THE preceding chapters will have given some idea, however imperfect, of the character of the country in which the Seistan Mission found itself on its arrival in the field of its labours at the beginning of 1903. The detailed narrative of our journeyings may now be left for a space. Split as the Mission was for the greater part of the time into a number of small parties, each engaged in a different branch of investigation, it would be both difficult and tedious to carry the chronological story of events through the next couple of years so as to present a connected record of the Mission's labours. Some general impressions, however, clearly emerge.

Life in Seistan was very much the same as residence in a museum. Since in this case our museum covered an area of something like three thousand square miles, mental occupation was agreeably combined with an open-air life,

and those who engaged in research derived the advantages of both. The Mission, however, was essentially political in its objects, and the problems to which we gave our attention in other directions not infrequently required a degree of special scientific training which none of us possessed. But for this, the results of our investigations into the many and varied problems which the country presents would no doubt have been more definite and comprehensive. As it was, at the time when our stay in Seistan was coming to an end some of us felt that we were merely on the verge of valuable and interesting fields of inquiry.

While this must be freely admitted, it may fairly be claimed for the Mission that it collected stores of data both about the physical characteristics and evolution of the country and about the history and present development of its inhabitants greater than have been brought together by any other single expedition. Both studies were of the most engrossing interest. Some of the wind "scours" in Seistan provided us with sections not only of the materials composing the plateaus but of the more recent alluvial deposits, wherein seemed to be laid bare the various stages in the history of the human occupation of the country. Even among the present inhabitants it was possible to descry something very similar. Fragments, as it were, of older races could be recognised mixed up with the descendants of recent immigrants, showing how from the most ancient periods the population of Seistan had been replenished from outside sources.

In such results as were procured, we undoubtedly took the more pride by reason of the conditions under which they were obtained. Of the physical conditions the outstanding factor was unquestionably the "Bad-i-sad-o-bist-roz," the famous "Wind of 120 Days." If there is one feature of life in Seistan which dominates all others it is this appalling wind which blows from May to September. It seems to prevail over a tract of country about a hundred miles in width, and has been noticed as far to the north of Seistan as the neighbourhood of Meshed. Further away from Seistan in the direction of Nushki the wind decreases rapidly in velocity, though it is sometimes felt to a modified extent as far east as the Dalbandin plain.

The late Sir Charles MacGregor was the first to draw attention to this phenomenon, and he describes it in graphic terms in the records of his travels in Khorassan. Only those, however, who have experienced the wind of 120 days in the exposed plains of Seistan are able to form a correct idea of what it is like in its true home.

In 1903, when we passed the summer in tents, we had to be very careful how our trunks and furniture were arranged inside. A trunk or a table placed close enough to be within reach of the walls of the tent, as they swayed and sagged to the blast, soon wore a hole through the cloth; and even a walking-stick or a cane would do the same by the mere friction of the end against the canvas.

The appearance of things much more substantial than canvas, however, testified to the destructive force of the

wind at nearly every step and turn that we took in Seistan. Driving before it great clouds of dust and gravel it acts like a perfect sand blast. Even the strongest buildings suffer from its effects. Acting in conjunction with damp it soon destroys all walls of earth or adobe. Among the ruins loose baked bricks take on an edge like a saw with deeply cut teeth. Walls which were at right angles to the direction of the wind have been completely removed by its violence, while those parallel to its direction are in course of time ground and pared slowly away.

Seeing these results one felt that it was no empty figure of speech in which Malik Azim Khan, one of the descendants of Kai Khasrau, likened the effect of the wind of 120 days. "Sir," he said to me, "the wind of Seistan wears away the walls of our buildings as the whetstone wears away steel."

But the tearing effects of the wind are most evident on the summits of the low plateaus that are encountered in various parts of the country. On the plateau which bears the ruins of Zāhidān there are in places rifts some hundreds of yards long and quite fifteen or twenty feet deep and many more in width, the materials of which have gone to form the sandhills that have gathered round the ruins. One day in particular I remember, in September of the first year we spent in Seistan, when I was in camp to leeward of the exposed summit of a low plateau that stretches from the west of Nasratābād in the direction of the village of Bahramabad. A gale sprang up, and though the wind was not so strong as it had been earlier

in the summer the dust that streamed from the plateau made life in camp unendurable. I passed the day in a deck chair, the back of which was towards the windward end of the small tent, wrapped up in a sheet drawn over my head and face. Dust accumulated everywhere. Table, bed, and carpet alike were covered with thick dust. Every time I moved out of my chair, pounds of dust were shaken out of the folds of the sheet which covered me. At last, in sheer desperation, I ordered two riding camels to be saddled, and in the teeth of the wind fled to the capital and took refuge within the hospitable walls of the Consulate, where I remained as long as the gale continued.

In contrast with the exposed plateaus, cultivated and irrigated lands enjoy a double advantage. By the process of irrigation the silt with which the water is charged is spread annually over the country, while the presence of moisture and vegetation directly retards erosion. Indeed any loss by erosion in these lands is more than equalised by the gain from silt. Anyone who lives in Seistan soon learns to know the different effects of the wind in different localities. While the dust streams off the exposed plateaus in dense clouds, it is barely sufficient on the irrigated lands to cause discomfort. There is also a difference in the temperature of the wind, and these differences may be apparent at places quite close together. At one point the wind may be a hot and scorching blast, raising clouds of dust. At another, perhaps only a very few miles away, no inconvenience is felt from the dust, and the wind is pleasant. On one part of the country the glare and refraction from

the heated gravel, or blistered plains of white soil, are almost intolerable. In an adjoining tract the eye is rested by the verdure of growing crops and wild vegetation. All depends on the position of the observer.

With all its differences of effect in different places, the wind of 120 days is the one constant feature in the climate of Seistan. It may vary slightly in strength and duration from year to year, but invariably it blows from the north-north-west. Its exact direction at its height is 334 degrees west, and five degrees on either side of that bearing is its greatest deviation. A change from its general direction always precedes a cessation of wind. At its commencement it may fluctuate within the ten degrees of variation alluded to, but as soon as it has set and has increased in velocity, its direction remains unchanged till it again approaches its termination.

The wind is due when two months have elapsed after the Nauroz Festival (21st March). Sometimes it is punctual, as it was in 1904, when it commenced on the 22nd May with a strong gale which lasted four or five days, though it did not set in in earnest till the 5th June. On the other hand in 1902 the wind did not set in till July, and it was not so strong as in the following year. After the 5th June, 1904, there was a great deal of wind throughout the month, but no greater velocity than sixty-five miles an hour was recorded by our two anemometers. From the point of view of discomfort the early gales are always the worst, because then the material loosened by the action of frost and heat is swept away, and later the amount

of dust diminishes in a marked degree, unless there are sand dunes to windward.

Contrary to our experience of dust-storms in India, in Seistan during the wind of 120 days the sky overhead was clear, and at night the stars were never obscured. The aneroid barometers with which our observatory was supplied, afforded little or no indication of the approach of the wind. It was always heralded, however, after a short period of calm weather, by the appearance in the sky to the north-west of horizontal bars of dust or cloud, low down on the horizon; and about twelve hours after these were first visible a gale would be blowing. The commencement of a period of high winds invariably followed a marked rise in temperature, and when the latter had been reduced considerably the wind abated. In June, 1904, after the wind had been blowing a fortnight, the maximum temperature in the shade during the day was only 98° Fahrenheit, and the minimum temperature at night sank to 61°. Sitting outside our mess tent after dinner we felt a white jacket to be rather too light a garment, and anyone sleeping out of doors required a blanket.

So far as our personal comfort was concerned, the wind and heat and other torments were much more endurable in the main camp after huts had been built to accommodate the officers. My hut was twenty feet square, with thick adobe walls ten feet high. Two pillars in the middle of it solved the difficulty about beams, and permitted a fairly substantial roof to be put on. On the windward side an opening four feet square was made in the wall, and

a screen of tamarisk boughs and camel thorn fitted into it from outside. This was wetted and kept moist with frequent douches of water and when the wind blew it cooled the hut. The extent to which the temperature could be reduced in this way was remarkable. One day in the second summer we spent in the country, when the maximum temperature in the shade in the observatory stood at 107°, a fresh wind passing through the moist screen lowered the temperature inside my hut to 75°, and as it was not very prudent to keep the temperature so low, the opening was reduced to about half its original size.

In August the turn of the season becomes noticeable. There is a curious phenomenon peculiar to Seistan, which is called the Dūd-i-Seistan—or the "Smoke of Seistan." It is a pall of smoke that begins to collect over the inhabited area as soon as the upper strata of the atmosphere begin to cool. As soon as it is noticed the worst of the summer is over. In 1904 this film of smoke was observed on the 23rd August. The minimum temperature that month varied from 74° to 61°, and an entry in my daily journal contains a note to the effect that at night a blanket was found to be very acceptable even indoors. On the 25th August I noted the appearance of the first flight of geese and ducks, and by the month of October, when I was surveying in the waterless region of the old and long-forsaken delta of the Rud-i-Biyabān, tents of the lightest description were found to be a sufficient protection from the heat. One night a curious drop in the temperature was experienced, the minimum falling

nearly to freezing point, though this was succeeded by an immediate rise.

In the winter in which we arrived in Seistan there had been only about two inches of snowfall, which speedily disappeared. But there was a great deal of rain and we had showers as late as the 15th May. In the winter following, on the 13th January, a snowfall of about six inches was experienced. But rain was not nearly so abundant as it had been in the preceding spring. The average rainfall in Seistan is not more than six inches, if as much. Heavy falls of snow are rare. There had been no snow equal to the fall in January, 1904, for fully fifty or fifty-five years. This fact was established in rather a strange way. I was introduced to an elderly gentleman who was known as Mulla Barfi. The title of Mulla, or "The Scholar," was given to him because he could write his name, and his name had been given to him—Barfi means "The Snowy"—because he had been born in the last great snowfall. As his age, judging by his appearance, must have been about fifty-five years, we seemed justified in the conclusion stated.

A hard winter with a blizzard after the Nauroz is what the people of Seistan desire. After a winter of this description, the grain forms well in the ears and a good harvest is secured. Here again the wind of 120 days is of the greatest value. Without this wind, the people would have to grind their corn in handmills, as the fall of the country is too small for watermills to be worked, in even the largest canals. Recourse is had therefore to



A WINDMILL IN SEISTAN.

windmills, and these imposing structures form a very marked feature in the landscape. They are permanent structures built of unbaked bricks and clay, and so constructed as to be able to get the full benefit of the wind within the narrow limits of variation in its direction.

In short, with all its drawbacks, the wind of 120 days is in many ways a blessing to Seistan. It mitigates the fierce heat of the summer, makes the country habitable, drives away miasma and generally purifies the atmosphere. Not least of its services, it clears Seistan of the myriads of insects that breed in the jungles and swamps. Of all the plagues of this plague-ridden country, the flies* are perhaps the least endurable. As in the case of the wind, their operations are different in different parts of the country. Their peculiarities in this respect are not easy of explanation. In our experience they could be regarded as almost a negligible quantity in the cultivated lands, while on the higher lands, not under cultivation, they would be found in swarms—and very hungry.

In March, 1904, for instance, I was encamped inside the cultivated area immediately adjoining the low plateau on which are situated the ruins of Zāhidān and the minaret to the north. We were not particularly harassed by insects in camp, but no sooner had we ridden up to the plateau, which was less than a quarter of a mile away and was perhaps not more than a foot above the cultivable soil, than every member of the party began to be

* The "Seistan fly" resembles a gadfly, and is armed with a very efficient sting.

tormented by myriads of flies. By the time we had ridden to the minaret, a distance of about seven miles, our hands and the quarters of the camels were streaked with blood drawn by their stings, and it was almost impossible to take photographs of the inscriptions on the minaret owing to the attacks to which we were incessantly subjected.

Happily the attacks of the Seistan fly are confined to the hours of daylight. Darkness seems to be obnoxious to them, and a horse placed in a dark stable is less liable to be attacked than if he were outside, even if the door be left open. A horse picketed in the open air in Seistan presents a strange appearance. To protect it against the fly it is completely clothed—its legs protected by trousers, and its body and neck wrapped in swaddling bands. In this way a valuable animal may have a chance of living longer than if it were not so protected, for though it cannot be maintained that the flies of Seistan are in themselves the origin of the diseases that do so much to reduce the animal life of the country, there is no doubt they play a very important part in spreading disease by inoculation.

Reference has already been made to the heart-breaking losses sustained by the Seistanis among their cattle in the year before we arrived in the country, and to the way in which the jungle had been swept clear of wild pig at the same time. Nor are the people themselves immune from sudden disease and death. In the early summer of 1904 typhus broke out and raged for a couple of months. How

many people died will never be known, but the mortality was certainly very great.

Our own losses in camels and horses were extremely heavy. Altogether something like 4,900 camels died during the two and a half years that the Mission lasted. The losses were particularly severe in the winter of 1903-4, when influenza of a peculiarly virulent type made its appearance in Seistan. At one camp between eight and nine hundred camels died within a week or ten days. The inhabitants of the Miān Kangi used to buy the dying animals for a few krans; for the skins they found a market in the capital, and the flesh they ate themselves or retailed to the inhabitants of the more distant villages of Seistan, who were unable to participate in the windfall in any other way.

The diseased meat did not seem to affect the people seriously, and although bowel complaints made their appearance in the spring, they were probably due more to over-eating than to any ill-effects from the meat of the camels that had died from sickness. The competition among the people for the privilege of removing the meat of the dead animals relieved us of a very serious task, as when the Seistani had stripped the flesh off the skeleton of a dead camel the work was at once completed by jackals, which not only picked the skeleton clean but dismembered the limbs and dragged away the bones piecemeal into the jungle.

Many and mysterious are the ills to which camels are subject. In April and May, for instance, the Seistanis say that the camel thorn is harmful. The sap exudes from

the bushes, which in the early morning is seen in clots of a white substance and looking as though covered with gauze or cobwebs. As the sun increases in power this substance melts, and for an hour or two after sunrise the ground at the foot of the bushes is saturated with moisture. At the period of the year when this happens, camels that browse on the plant are said to be sure to die.

However this may be, certainly no other animal dies with such paralyzing alacrity. One morning in March, 1903, while I was at breakfast a fine camel bubbled over and died before I had finished. The circumstances were peculiar. During the rutting season male camels produce at times, from some part of their interior economy, a large bladder (accompanied by a bubbling noise), which frequently hangs below their jaws. On this occasion the camel could not draw the bladder into its throat again in the usual manner by suction. Before any one realised the danger the beast was choking, and though the men in charge soon saw what had happened and tried to force back the bladder, all efforts to save its life were useless. The camelmen said that this was a very unusual occurrence. More than the usual amount of bladder had been ejected and could not be either drawn back voluntarily or put back artificially.

Once a camel was taken ill there was little hope of saving its life unless it recovered naturally. Those who look after camels profess a great deal of knowledge, but the field must be a very small one, as the treatment is confined almost entirely to cautery. The implement used is the sickle which every camelman possesses and with

which he cuts fodder for his charge. A committee of experts assembles when a camel is ill, to decide on how the treatment is to be carried out, and while they deliberate a sickle is made red hot. If the committee decide that the animal's brain is not clear it is severely branded across the head. In other respects, however, the principle underlying the treatment is exceedingly obscure. Suppose, for instance, a camel is lame on the near foreleg. To the inexpert observer it would seem useful to apply a remedy to the limb that is afflicted. The "expert" knows better, and brands the animal at the root of the tail on the opposite quarter. If it recovers, all is well; if not, the treatment is repeated in a different part. As a camel offers a large surface for experiment with a red-hot iron, it may be imagined that the lot of a sickly beast is far from a happy one.

As regards the personnel of the Mission, casualties were comparatively few in view of all the conditions. One disaster, which attracted widespread attention as affording another illustration of the splendid devotion to duty of which our native Indian fellow-subjects are capable, was the more regrettable because it might have been avoided but for an excess of zeal on the part of an old and experienced native survey officer. It is difficult to blame the spirit of adventure that led Khan Bahadur Shekh Mohi-ud-din to attempt the crossing of the Dasht-i-Margo (the dreaded Plain of Death) at the very worst time of the year, the middle of June, when any mishap or miscalculation would infallibly result in the destruction of the

party. Yet only a fortnight or three weeks later, and the first of the melon crop would have rendered the task he undertook perfectly feasible, and death from thirst, at all events, impossible. As it was, only three men of the party survived, from whom details of the ill-fated journey were gleaned.

It seems that Shekh Mohi-ud-din had finished the task that had been set him to do. He had discovered the great Karez that once upon a time had supplied the Sarotār district with water, and had visited the southern edge of the Jehannam (Inferno) of Seistan. From the summit of the cliffs overlooking the Inferno, he had been able to discover the position of the clump of tamarisk that marked the depressions of Gazajai (Place of Tamarisks) and Lalla, in the midst of the billows of sand. He had also, and this proved the destruction of his party, been told that after the very heavy and unusual rain of the previous winter there was water in the depression of the Gazajai. Accordingly, the Khan Bahadur decided to make the attempt to cross the plateau.

The water at Gazajai was reached. There was plenty of it, but by that time of the year it had turned into concentrated brine, which badly affected men and beasts alike. Notwithstanding the remonstrances of his companions, Shekh Mohi-ud-din refused to retrace his steps to the river. There seems to be no doubt whatever that he had under-estimated the distance to be traversed. Instead of fifty miles, it was eighty, or thereabouts. The extra distance killed him and his men. Thinking that he had

come half-way, he filled the water skins and set out at sunset. The moon was waning, in the darkness the faint trail was missed, and after becoming involved in ravines and sandhills the party had only reached, by the time it was day, the foot of the cliffs bounding the Jehannam to the north of the water pool.

A halt was called and here a dispute arose with two of the guides who were mounted on camels, and who were for pushing on. These men rarely can tell definitely how far one place is from another, so in the light of his experience Shekh Mohi-ud-din thought he was right, and that by the next morning, travelling all night, the party would be certain to reach water. The guides disputed this, and at last, by mid-day, they flatly refused to stay there any longer, and told Shekh Mohi-ud-din that they had to consider their families. They rode away up the narrow path that led to the summit of the plateau and disappeared. There was still left one guide, a man of great experience, but he was on foot.

By evening the camels were loaded up, and a start made. All that night the little party, led by the guide, struggled along a faint path. The last of the water was shared on the summit of the plateau. By sunrise the next morning the party descended a deep gap in the western face of the plateau, and came to a place where a lofty cliff cast a deep shade. Here another halt was called, and a small tent was put up for Mohi-ud-din, who was in great distress. Acting under his instructions, some of the men went to seek water by digging in a neigh-

bouring ravine. A hole about five feet deep was dug, but only moist sand was reached, and with this the men cooled their bodies till evening was at hand. Then they went back to Shekh Mohi-ud-din and found that he had been dead some hours, and that his fine mare was breathing her last.

In the meantime the baggage camels had wandered away, and one of the camelmen had made off with some of the others when the halt was called. Four men decided to push on, but the guide and one camelman were too far gone to make the attempt. After the men had gone about a mile, one of them, named Saida, bethought himself of the plot on which Mohi-ud-din had laid down his route, and in spite of his companions' remonstrances he returned, secured the plot, tied it to his body with his waist-cloth so that it should not be lost, and rejoined his companions. Demented with thirst and fatigue, the men then pushed on as fast as they could, and by daylight found themselves on an open plain broken by a group of mounds. In the shade of these the men again halted. Saida urged his comrades to persevere, but they were too far gone to move any further. Accordingly he pushed on alone and at last reached a stream of water, only to fall senseless as he was stooping to drink.

In this condition some shepherds found him and took him to their tents. As soon as he recovered his senses Saida endeavoured to tell the shepherds what had happened, but being a native of India he could not make himself understood. News of some disaster in the desert



SHRINE OF KHWĀJA AMRĀN.

Note the peculiar architecture of the ruined minaret; like a Chinese pagoda.

having befallen a party of foreigners quickly spread, however, from camp to camp. Next came word of the two mounted guides, who had left the party in the Jehannam. They had tied themselves on their camels, and the animals had been found by shepherds. One man was unconscious, and the other partly so, but with careful treatment both soon revived.

After some sort of connected story had been put together, a search party was organised, and soon found the corpses of the three men who had stayed behind in the shadow of the buttes of clay. Nothing could be done but bury them temporarily, and after this duty had been performed the search party took up the back trail. Eventually, with great difficulty, they found the corpse of Shekh Mohi-ud-din, his guide, and one camelman. These also were given temporary burial. Later on in December, while the Mission was halted at the village of Deh Dost Muhammad in the Miān Kangi, the remains of these unfortunate men were recovered and decently interred at the Shrine of Amrān.

Of the camelman who went away with the camels from the disastrous halt in the shade of the cliffs nothing was ever heard. The other camels which strayed away later were discovered not far off. Their nose strings had caught in brambles, and the beasts were almost dead when discovered.

The heroism displayed by the man who was determined at all hazards to save the Khan Bahadur's map was promptly rewarded by Sir Henry McMahon. It was no small matter for a man in desperate peril of his life to turn

back to rescue a document of whose value he had only the vaguest idea.

While the desert took its toll of human lives from the Mission, the water with which the delta abounds also demanded its victims. At the commencement of our march along the Helmand everyone was cautious and we had no casualties, but this attitude soon gave place to over-confidence, and several persons were drowned in the main canal that flowed past our standing camp.

## CHAPTER XI.

### MARKING THE BOUNDARY.

Area surveyed by the Mission of 1903-5—Instructions to survey the triple frontier—Elaborate arrangements—Regular camp established—The usefulness of melons in the desert—View from Sena Rud—Birds in the desert—Migration of wild fowl—"Fossils"—The "River of the Desert" The Panther Mountains—Desert larks and the water tanks—Sir Henry McMahon inspects our work—Progress in the Trade Route—Wells sunk—The Mission's last tour in Seistan—The Lake basin—River scenery—Hydrophobia in the camp—Mad jackals—Baluch woman mauled by a jackal—Sheikh Weisi—A blizzard and its effects—Reeds and their seeds—A terrific wind—One hundred and twenty miles an hour—Mad wolf rushes the camp at night—Our heavy losses—Epidemic of rabies—Pasteur Institute at Kasauli—The shrine of Bibi Dost.

In the settlement of frontier disputes such as had arisen in Seistan, survey work must necessarily play a large part. The survey operations of the Mission of 1903-5 were on an extensive scale and embraced not only Seistan but considerable tracts of the surrounding country. Altogether an area of about 38,000 square miles was surveyed on a scale both of four miles to the inch and one mile to the inch. In this way not only was greater detail given to previous maps, but several districts which before were quite unknown were explored for the first time.

Much of this work was carried out for the purpose of obtaining knowledge of the general conditions of the frontier problem which the Mission had been sent to solve, and there was general rejoicing in our midst when, after we had been in Seistan over a year and a half, Sir Henry McMahon

gave instructions that the actual boundary between the Helmand and the Kuh-i-Malik Siah (the meeting point of Persia, Baluchistan, and Afghanistan) was to be surveyed and demarcated. At last our labours seemed to be drawing to a close, and we could look forward to the delights of life in an Indian station with some prospect that our hopes would before very long be realised.

This decree meant that I should be able to examine at leisure a tract of country I had not before visited, though in 1899, when travelling along the edge of the Lake basin, I had seen from a distance the cliffs which terminated the plateau over which the boundary was now to be laid down. From the Kuh-i-Malik Siah the frontier runs in a straight line for a distance of between eighty and ninety miles through desert country to the Band-i-Seistan, where it joins the Helmand at the take-off of the Rud-i-Seistan.

The work of demarcation was commenced from the side of the Helmand, and the most elaborate arrangements had to be made for the provisioning and watering of the large number of men and animals forming the party, in a tract of country where at the time of our journey (the autumn of 1904) nothing but fuel was to be hoped for along the line of our route.

Water, of course, was the first consideration. In some lengths of the boundary it had to be carried for twenty-five miles—a task of some difficulty in view of the great heat. The air in September on the irrigated lands was full of the promise of cold weather, but on the sun-blistered and wind-swept terraces of the desert plateau quite a different

climate prevailed, and the blasts had not yet lost their fiery quality. Evaporation, indeed, was our worst enemy, more water being lost in transit on this account than reached us in the desert.

At our base of supplies, near Aliabad, a regular camp was established and all possible arrangements made beforehand. Evaporation we could not avoid—but it was very necessary that the water-skins should not leak. To provide against this danger the services of a cobbler were engaged, and it was arranged that the water-skins should be filled some hours before they were to leave the base camp, and that any leaks then revealed should be mended and the seams caulked with cotton waste and tallow. To get tallow we were obliged to purchase sheep and have them killed, as there was no other way of providing it. Russian petroleum had been imported into Seistan from the north, and the large drums containing the oil, when emptied and cleaned, made very useful receptacles for storing the water sent out to us in the desert. Empty kerosene oil tins and, in fact, any kind of vessels that would hold water were at a premium. Each person was supplied with a canvas bag for holding water, which kept the water beautifully cool, though the porous material allowed the contents to evaporate very rapidly.

In addition to our supplies of water camel loads of melons were purchased and often formed a most useful substitute. The fruit used to be served out to each man and to the riding camels, the latter getting all the fruit that had been bruised or crushed in transit. Once the

melons begin to ripen in Seistan—that is, about the middle of July—the surrounding deserts lose all their terrors. The passage of waterless tracts becomes a comparatively simple matter. The fruit serves as both food and drink for man as well as animals, and there is no absolute need to carry water at all.

Having put everything in train I made a start up the valley of the Sena Rud, following the winding course of its old deep water channel. About eighteen miles above the village of Aliabad a camp was formed at a spot where the shrivelled remains of the vegetation that had sprung up in the previous spring still endured as a witness to the power of the sun during the summer months. The desiccated remains of alkali bushes and of the desert tamarisk had faded to such an extent that their presence could barely be detected from a distance. Too dry and sapless to be useful as fodder, they provided us with fuel. From this point all the camels except three or four for riding were sent back to the water camp, and henceforward loads of fodder used to be sent out for the use of those which remained.

Our camp in the Sena Rud, where our work kept us some little time, was situated in one of the wildest and most desolate spots that it is possible to imagine. Under a pale blue sky there was spread out a wide expanse of terraces rising one above the other towards the south, covered with blackened fragments of gravel, against which the narrow white strip of the ancient river-bed stood out in high relief. To the north the steep slopes of the Bāla

Dasht rose to a height of a hundred and fifty feet above the valley, and the raw weatherworn cliffs formed a startling contrast to the sky above and the dark-coloured plain below. The only living creatures besides ourselves and the camels were two huge ravens, which had followed the caravan up the valley. Fluttering from pinnacle to pinnacle of the weatherworn cliffs they had kept pace with the loaded camels, knowing full well that sooner or later they would have an opportunity of gorging themselves on any that succumbed to disease or hardship. The glossy plumage and hoarse notes of these birds, as they called to one another from the cliffs, harmonised well with the desolate surroundings of the camp.

Later on we were visited by desert larks, when they discovered that our tanks held water. Then the wild fowl began to move eastward, and wisps of teal and duck passed overhead on their journey from the lake towards the swamps and lagoons of the Indus and still further east. Shortly after sunset, wedge-shaped flocks used to make their appearance moving swiftly eastwards, and their flight continued till the small hours of the morning. Long after darkness had set in, and their forms could no longer be distinguished, their movements could be followed by the sound of the strokes of their powerful pinions. The stronger birds could make the passage without mishap, but very frequently the feebler coot were unable to reach the banks of the Helmand, and were compelled to alight on the desert to suffer a lingering death from thirst. Fully a dozen exhausted coot were taken alive in the neigh-

bourhood of the camp. The Baluch guides were greatly elated by these captures, for not only did the birds provide them with a mouthful of fresh meat, but their presence on the dasht was held to be a prognostication of a severe winter.

One would have thought that at a distance of eighteen miles from water insects would not have been troublesome, but there they were, and while I was writing or reading after dinner quite a collection of feeble little creatures, tiny moths and other insects, used to gather inside the candle shades. Perhaps they may have been brought by the wind. Flies there were in abundance; but flies we carried with us, baggage camels as a rule being unclean and badly groomed.

One evening, shortly after our camp had been established three or four Baluchis made their appearance driving before them as many head of cattle; but they passed without stopping to have a talk. For a Baluch to do this shows he must be in a desperate hurry, for ordinarily he is the most loquacious of mankind. Doubtless the cattle had been lightly come by and the Baluchis were hastening to get into Afghan territory by way of the Sena Rud, the advantages of which for such purposes have been described in a previous chapter. The frontier passed a hundred yards from our camp, and probably these supposed cattle thieves were the first persons who derived any benefit from our labours.

At this same camp a report was brought to me that in a ravine leading to the Allahyār Nāwar some large bones had been discovered partially buried in the strata of

"kim." I had been looking out for fossils ever since we had entered the region where this formation occurs, and as soon as possible set out for the spot indicated. The depression known as Allahyār's Tank is surrounded on three sides by high cliffs where the plateau has broken off short. The floor covered about a quarter of a square mile and was composed of hard white material, on which there stood about a dozen cones of harder material turned and dressed by the action of the wind. The "fossils" proved to be nothing more than some irregular masses of a coarse-grained and friable limestone, and in addition to my disappointment at this discovery we narrowly escaped a very bad accident, one of the camels falling on the steep slope leading down to the hollow and rolling right to the bottom.

By slow degrees the straight line of the boundary was continued towards the south-west, and at length we entered the delta of the Rud-i-Biyabān—the "River of the Desert"—up which nearly two years before, Ward and I had passed to the ruins of the City of Rustam. It is not so very long ago, as history counts, since the Helmand poured its waters down the Rud-i-Biyabān, finding an outlet in the delta through half-a-dozen channels which are still defined by low islands, as it were, rising from the plain. Upon one of these, on which our camp was pitched, slightly higher than those around it, there stands a mausoleum containing several graves and known as "Yak Gumbaz," or the "Solitary Domed Building." Every rising piece of ground was crowned with similar buildings containing the graves

of the people who dwelt in the ruined manor houses along the river banks.

In a way this tract is even more desolate than the valley of the Sena Rud, owing to the numerous traces of its former occupation and desertion by man; but the scenery is saved from monotony by the magnificent background formed by the Palangān Kuh (the Panther Mountains) to the west of the lake basin. As seen from my tent at sunrise, the highest peaks of these mountains were the first to catch the light, while the low country between was in shadow. As the sun passed the meridian, the north-western trend of the range caused the detail very soon to be lost in deep masses of shadows, first almost purple, and then, as the light faded, a deep pure blue. With this panorama in the distance (for the peaks were quite thirty or forty miles away) the tame foreground of the abandoned delta was glorified, especially at or near sunset, when the gravel-covered summits and the mausolea which crowned them were bathed in a flood of mellow light and at times were almost luminous, so rich were the tones of gold and orange which transfigured the adobe buildings and the broken terraces on which they stand.

It is in many respects a very interesting tract. The wide plains that extend to the Lake basin from the foot of the cliffs on which we had been setting up the boundary pillars are covered with a multitude of natural mounds, varying from five to forty-five feet in height, most of which represent the depth of the upper soil that has been removed by erosion. Each of these mounds is crowned

with a thick layer of potsherds, among which we also found some stone implements shaped like arrow-heads, and on some of the larger mounds walls can be traced. Looking at the country now it is hard to believe that less than a couple of hundred years ago this deserted tract was thickly populated as far as the Gaud-i-Zireh, and was in fact Seistan—the seat of the population; or that as late as a hundred years ago parts of the tract were still inhabited, and desperate attempts were made to irrigate it by means of a canal which took off from the Helmand above Bandar.

During our stay at Yak Gumbaz, the iron tanks into which the water-skins used to be emptied were placed on the shady side of the ruin. Here they were visited every morning and evening by hundreds of desert larks, and the silence of this inhospitable region was agreeably broken by their melodious notes, as each one of the tiny brown birds sang its little song, as if of thanksgiving for the water, before leaving its home upon the plateau or in the river bed near at hand. The nearest water was fifteen miles distant, and those birds must have resorted there at least once a day.

One by one the boundary pillars were raised, and eventually the Kuh-i-Malik Siah was reached. Before we returned Sir Henry McMahon came and inspected our work, then the pillars received a final coat of whitewash, and we made ready to depart for the main camp, gathering up our impedimenta and concentrating at the wells of Muhammad Reza Chah, on the western edge of the lake.

I had passed by this place in 1899, and so was able to appreciate the progress that had been made in the interval. In 1899 the track along which the Boundary Commission of 1896 had travelled was still in existence and had been roughly "blazed" as the "Trade Route." Although posts had been established, there were no conveniences then for travellers along the route, such as have now been provided. At that time a single well had been sunk, about three feet in diameter, which may have been the actual well which the Sarbandi chieftain Muhammad Reza Khān (who was blinded by order of Nādir Shāh) had caused to be dug. There is no water nearer than the villages of Warmāl or Sehkuha, and the construction of the original well by Muhammad Reza Khān was a most useful public work for which many a weary traveller must have blessed the Sarbandi chieftain.

In 1904 six or eight wells were sunk, each about ten feet in diameter and as many deep, and these provided us with a plentiful supply of water of a most excellent quality. The wells were dug in the floor of a deep bay outlined by cliffs, which form part of a wedge-shaped terrace separating the northern or modern delta from that of the Rud-i-Biyabān. Whenever there is much water in the lake the bay in which the wells are situated is flooded, and then for months water covers the floor and its waves dash on the narrow shingly beach at the foot of the cliffs. That is what happened the year before our visit. The Helmand contained a discharge of about an average volume, and the water found its way into the bay in which the post and



1 3 2 4 5 6 7 8

(1) Lieut. Stewart. (2) Col. Sir Henry McMahon. (3) Major Walters. (4) Major Irvine, I.M.S. (5) Mr. Tate. (6) Mr. Ward. (7) Captain Bell. (8) Captain Ramsay.

A PIC-NIC PARTY—MOUTH OF THE FARAH RUD.

wells are situated. The former was flooded out and the wells were partly silted up but not destroyed. The Levies who held the post retired to a position at the top of the cliffs and built themselves temporary shelters in which they stayed till the waters subsided, when they cleaned out the wells, rebuilt their huts, and traffic was resumed.

Although Muhammad Reza Chah was on the road to the Mission camp, we were not yet at the end of our labours. There remained to be delimited the northern portion of the boundary, and there were still in store for us new experiences of the climate and other horrors—blizzards with snow and bitter cold, mixed up with mad wolves; times when a demented creature, at the height of a madly raging hurricane, would rush through the darkness from camp to camp, like the Wehr Wolf of fable, worrying and injuring all that came in its way.

There is no need, however, to anticipate. By the middle of November, 1904, I was back in the main camp, and a week or so later sallied out with the Mission on its last tour in Seistan. On the 24th November we were again on the edge of the Lake basin, in the north of the Miān Kangi district. The lake was very much drier on this occasion than it had been the previous winter; in the north-eastern pocket there was said to be barely a foot and a half of water, and that was brine. Half-way through December we marched across the floor of the lake and encamped at the mouth of the river of Farāh. Here at last we were on ground that few of us had seen before, and it was a welcome change from the familiar surroundings of the Miān Kangi.

Close to our camp on the west lay the magnificent sheet of water known as the Hāmun (or Lake) of Sāwari, so named from the town of Sāwari Shāh which lay below its waters, and from the shrine dedicated to Sāwari Shāh, an old time saint, which was situated on a bluff of the western shore. Fifteen miles of water, unbroken by reed-beds, lay between us and the shrine in a direct line from our camp.

The last five or six miles of the bed of the River of Farāh had been scoured out to a great depth, and the water of the lake had filled this part of the river—which otherwise was dry—and formed a deep and winding pool between the wooded banks. Apart from the ever-present tamarisk, the steep banks were clothed very thickly with the Babylonian willow, which still bore their rich autumn foliage. Every detail of leaf and branch was faithfully reflected on the placid surface of the deep water that filled the winding reaches of the river, and the whole made a picture that will not easily be forgotten. The belt of trees was only a few yards wide. Beyond it was a zone of tamarisk very little deeper, and immediately beyond, the open ground was reached. A belt of Bunnu grass gave place to reeds in one direction, while a still more dreary view presented itself in the other, where the ground was thick with saline matter, which gave a curious wintry appearance to the landscape, and where only the alkali bush and stunted tamarisk grew.

These cheerless surroundings heightened the effect of the river scenery. Our fleet was immediately launched on the pool, and the calm beauty of the landscape was height-

ened by the white sails of the boats as they manœuvred in the narrow channel, not more than about eighty yards wide.

About eight miles to the north of the camp rose the Kuh-i-Kuch, a hill some three hundred feet in height, which formed the chief feature in the surrounding landscape. From its summit, looking northwards, the effect of the successive subsidences that have formed the hollow in which Seistan lies was most clearly defined in the succession of terraces that descend towards the lake, the light-coloured chalk-like cliffs outlining the ancient lines of fracture caused by the settling down of the terraces.

After some of us had made a tour round the northern shores of the Sāwari Lake, which occupied the rest of December, it was time to return to our standing camp, as the Helmand was rising, and every day brought news of fresh areas in the Lake basin being filled with water. By the middle of January the whole camp was once more on the move from the Fārah Rud, and now began a period of new anxiety. The very day that we left, a man, who had been bitten by a jackal early in December, and had developed hydrophobia, succumbed to this terrible malady. He had been bitten in the face as he lay asleep in the bivouac where the transport drivers were in camp with their animals. Rabies had broken out among the wild animals early in the winter, and this occurrence brought the fact prominently to our notice.

From the River of Farāh I proceeded to the place where this unfortunate man had been bitten, while the

destination of the Mission was the township of Sheikh Weisi, in the Miān Kangi. That evening as I sat at tea in my tent, a sudden commotion took place among the huts of the small hamlet near which I was spending the night. A hubbub of excited voices was followed by the report of a gun, after which the uproar gradually ceased. A man sent to ascertain what had occurred, came back and reported that a rabid jackal had entered the courtyard of one of the dwellings and had been shot by one of the neighbours. The woman to whom the hut belonged had a narrow escape, only just having time to drag her children inside the hut and to put up the hurdle that took the place of a door. Fortunately a large white cock had attracted the jackal's attention, and the furious brute had turned aside to worry it.

The next evening a second jackal was killed on the outskirts of the hamlet, and the evening after that, while I was finishing a pipe at the camp fire, another of the brutes came right up to the fire and gibbered at me. Calling to the men to look out, I dived into the tent for my gun, and as they ran up the jackal fled. The verdict of the people of the country was that the animal could not have been mad then or it would not have run away. Encamped as we were on the outskirts of the heavy tamarisk jungle, and in tents which at the best of times cannot be made very secure, our position was neither pleasant nor safe, with an epidemic of this nature prevailing among the jackals which infested the jungle.

These animals sometimes enter human dwellings and



XMAS CAMP AT HĀMUN-I-SĀWARI.

conceal themselves and afterwards attack the inmates. A sad case of a Baluch woman was reported from Nād Ali. She had occasion to enter her hut late one evening, and no sooner had she set foot inside than a jackal seized her by the ankle. When she stooped down and tried to drive it off it seized one of her hands and pulled her down, and by the time her neighbours came to her assistance she had been fearfully mauled. Her husband being too poor to be able to make up an offering for the shrine of Bibi Dost, the recognised resort in such cases, his neighbours out of their poverty raised a subscription, and the suffering woman was taken to the shrine.

On the day following my own experience of the boldness of the jackals, I rejoined the Mission at Sheikh Weisi. Early the next morning the wind which had sprung up rapidly developed into a blizzard. On the night of the 20th January fourteen degrees of frost were registered, and on the 21st the temperature never rose above twenty degrees above zero (Fah.). During the whole of Sunday, the 22nd, the temperature was never higher than thirteen degrees above zero, and the following night the minimum thermometer recorded 4.5 degrees above zero on the stand in the camp observatory, while two degrees above zero was recorded on the ground by another instrument. The Helmand was frozen over in all its branches, and so were even the shallower parts of the lake inside the reed beds, where the water was protected from the wind. After a thaw set in on the 24th the surface of the water was covered with dead fish that had been nipped in the ice.

We had rather a strange experience at this camp. To the north and west of the Sheikh Weisi township stretch entensive beds of bulrushes and reeds which flower in the autumn. The seed pods are cylindrical, about four to six inches long, and have a fine and very brittle sheath. When the latter dries the smallest movement of the bulrushes and reeds causes it to burst, on which myriads of fluffy germs are set free. At such times it is dangerous to force a way through the beds of reeds, as the fine seeds and the silky fluffs attached to them may very easily enter the air passages of the nose and throat. On this occasion the blizzard, as it swept through the beds to windward, shattered the pods and scattered the seeds broadcast over the country. The ground on which our camp was placed was covered with them so thickly that after the gale had abated it appeared as if snow had fallen, and in hollows and behind the ridges of the ploughed fields, miniature drifts had collected. Although our tents were large and weather proof, and owing to the cold had been closely fastened, it was impossible to keep the fluffs out. The carpet of my tent was grey with them. It was a practical demonstration of the way in which the distribution of the seeds takes place, and explained how it is that reeds are found growing even in places like the Inferno of Seistan—after rain.

On the 26th January we marched to a place not far from the ruins of Jallalābād, and that same evening the wind again developed into a hurricane. Next morning I found that a small drift of snow had formed on the foot of my



KUH-I-KHWAJA, LOOKING ACROSS THE VILLAGE OF MUHAMMAD SAFAR.

(*From a Drawing by the Author.*)

bed, and was frozen hard, while a similar drift lay on the drugget that covered the ground. Outside, snow was still falling, and we should probably have experienced a record fall had not the wind prevented the snow from collecting except on the lee side of mounds and old walls.

We reached our camp on the plateau on the following day, and though that day was bitterly cold the weather afterwards grew milder, and for the next two months we had no cold worth mentioning. In the early part of February I visited the Kuh-i-Khwāja Hill in the Lake, and though wading a good deal in the water, examining its depth in different places, I felt no inconvenience from either wind or cold. But the winter was not yet over. Near the end of March thunder-storms were accompanied by heavy showers of rain, and it became necessary to light our stoves once more. We were about to experience a change which would show that with all our knowledge of the winds of Seistan, we had still to learn of what they were capable.

On the 27th March the wind was blowing at the rate of fifty miles an hour; the temperature stood only a degree or two above freezing point, and during the night it fell to fourteen degrees below freezing. Next day things got worse. After dinner the wind seemed to be at its height, and I set out to read the anemometers in order to see what velocity had been attained. The instruments had been set up on a rise, about five feet above the general level of the plateau on which our camp was situated, and some three hundred yards from the mess hut. Two lanterns were

extinguished before I had gone more than a few yards, and it became evident that assistance would be necessary if the observations were to be taken. Major Irvine, I.M.S., who had been looking after our welfare during the Mission in the double capacity of medical officer and mess president, very kindly offered his services, and suggested that we should proceed toward the mound back to back, he walking backwards with a bull's-eye lantern under his cloak, while I led the way. In this fashion we at length managed to reach the summit of the mound. For an instant in the dark, with the wind shrieking and the gravel with which it was laden hitting me in the face, I was at a loss which way to turn to look for the anemometers. A faint gleam of light escaping from under Irvine's coat pointed the way, and then Irvine succeeded in holding up the lantern to light the dial, while I noted four runs at very short intervals so as to secure a reliable observation, as the pointer was moving at racing speed. Even in the short time it took to secure the four readings, and to note them, the buffeting of the wind and the gravel that was flung in our faces was almost too much to be borne. Afterwards, however, we were glad that we had taken the observations, since they showed the wind to have been blowing at a velocity of a hundred and twenty miles an hour.

During this gale the average hourly velocity from the records of the two instruments, over a period of sixteen hours, was eighty-eight miles. This rate was the highest we recorded during the Mission. Previous to this record

sixty-eight miles had been recorded in July, 1904, and this velocity occurred during a gale following a maximum temperature of 116·5 in the shade—the highest recorded that year.

Although the wind-storm was quite enough to try us, the men who were in charge of the camels had to contend against a still worse experience. Before dawn a mad wolf made its appearance, and the first notice any one had of it was its rushing into a tent where several men were asleep, and carrying off a thickly-wadded quilt which covered one of the men. The inmates of the tent were roused, and there was no more sleep for any one for the rest of the night. There were three camps with a large number of camels in each, separated from one another by a space of about three hundred yards. From one camp to another the wolf ran, and though in the darkness the men were unable to see it, the roaring of the camels warned them that the beast was in their midst. With their swords drawn the men stood on their defence. In the darkness every now and again a man would imagine he saw the wolf, and cut at it, and it is a wonder that they did not injure one another, as the state of nervous tension must have been very great. It was barely possible to hear or see anything, and they were practically at the mercy of the frantic beast, which rushed backwards and forwards biting everything that it could reach until daybreak, when it made off.

When the damage the wolf had caused was added up it was found that seventy-eight camels alone had been injured by it. Other animals, such as dogs and goats, which had

been bitten were destroyed on the spot; but camels to us were of untold value, and so the camels which had been bitten were destroyed when they showed signs of rabies, and not till then. The disease with them took a strange form. They used to tear their own limbs and bodies, and as they were isolated they had no opportunities of biting other camels.

On the last day of March news was brought into camp that the mad wolf had been destroyed. It had entered a Baluch encampment, where it tore the face of a sleeping man, bit a second in the arm, and was shot by a third man at close quarters. This happened only a dozen miles from our transport camp. Fortunately, however, none of our men were injured.

For some time after the mad wolf had attacked our transport lines, everyone in the main camp was on the alert, and watch and ward were kept regularly every night. Almost all of us had built huts, but our quarters possessed no doors, and the curtains that afforded privacy were too slight a protection against the inroads of a savage animal. Various incidents continued to spur our vigilance. One of our native officers who was exercising a horse a little way from camp came upon a wolf in its last agony, and early one morning some Ghilzai camelmen brought in a wolf they had killed during the night. It had come right in among the men and camels, but the sentry was ready with his sword, and it made for the main canal, where the men killed it just as it was taking to water. A day or so later, having occasion to ride out to Māshi, I met there an en-

campment of shepherds, who told me that two rabid wolves had come down the Helmand and entered the sheep pens, and there alone had bitten thirty-two sheep and goats, beside dogs.

These shepherds gave a strange reason for the epidemic of rabies. According to them it was caused by the wild beasts eating dead larks. In some years, they said, the larks develop extraordinary vitality, and pour forth such a flood of song as they rise on the wing that they become suffocated and fall to the ground dead. A wild animal which eats one of these dead birds infallibly develops rabies. This is a widespread superstition, and it seemed not unfamiliar to the natives of India who were with me.

Sometime after the scare about mad wolves had subsided, a horse developed rabies, and had to be destroyed. It was out of sorts one morning and had been sent up to our quarters to be inspected by the Commandant. On the way the horse ran at the groom, who dropped the halter and fled for his life towards our huts, with the horse at his heels. Fortunately for him, just as we thought he would be overtaken, a spasm seized the horse, which collapsed on the ground a few yards from where some of us were standing. The whole thing passed so quickly that we were unable to do anything, as the horse had showed no signs of any injury, and it is impossible to be always prepared for every contingency. The horse was led back to the lines, and by evening it had become furious, kicking and biting at everything within reach, so that it had to be shot.

One man belonging to the camel corps was sent for

treatment to the Pasteur Institute at Kasauli. He was coming into camp with some camels, and turned off from the path for a moment, when a jackal sprang at him out of a bush. Fortunately he was able to seize it before he was bitten. He was unarmed, but having very luckily caught the animal by the throat he throttled it, and beyond a few scratches came off unscathed. This man and the poor fellow who died at the Farāh Rud of rabies were the only persons of our regular establishment who were injured. At Sheikh Weisi, a Seistani employed by us was bitten while gathering fuel, but he of course went off to the shrine of Bibi Dost.

It was never quite clear why Bibi Dost was supposed to exercise a healing influence on injuries received from rabid animals. The popular idea is that no sooner is a person bitten than he or she is mad—though the disease may not have taken an active form. The visit to the shrine is believed to cure the sufferer—provided of course that it has not been decreed that he is to die in this way. The principal shrine dedicated to Bibi Dost is close to the village of Kāsamābād. It is here that the sufferers resort. There are many shrines, offshoots of this, but the efficacy of the cure is most sure at the parent shrine. The virtue attributed to this spot represents in all probability some ancient belief of pre-Islamitic times which has been included in the Mohammedan faith and received its sanction.*

* There are shrines in Afghanistan and in India, which are supposed to cure all who visit them after being wounded by a rabid animal.

## CHAPTER XII.

### LAST DAYS IN SEISTAN.

Relaxations and entertainments—Keep in touch with the world—A well organized postal service—Curious mishap to our letters—The shrine of Bibi Dost—Nasratābād—A waterlogged city—A "scratch" dinner—Farewell banquet to the Mission—Standard of Persian education—A dangerous staircase—Cossacks' chanting—The Cossacks and our men entertain one another—Farewell Durbar—We start our homeward journey.

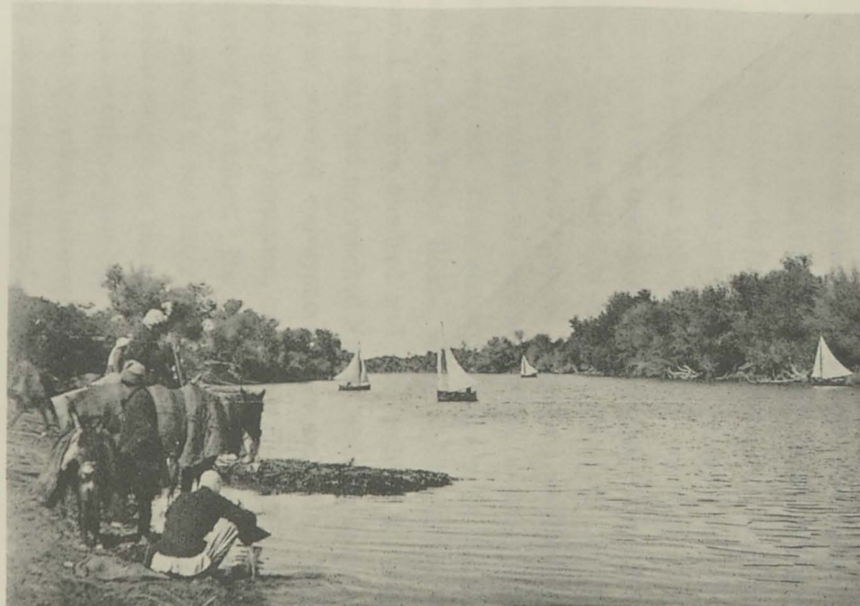
ALTHOUGH after our return to the standing camp early in 1905 there was still a good deal of work to occupy our attention, yet as the days passed on signs increased that the return of the Mission to Quetta would not be much longer delayed.

Each day brought forth its batch of reports, which used to be eagerly discussed, and those who had been placed in charge of special lines of research now began to look over their notes with a view to amplifying or strengthening weak links in the evidence they had amassed. Places were revisited for the purpose of settling uncertain points. Old Dādi, the descendant of an ancient family of canal makers and engineers, was in great request. The ancient Seif-ud-din, representative of a family of officials who had served the Princes of Seistan, had also been summoned to the camp. These men are the last of the past generation, and

were of great use to us in our search for information relating to the topography and affairs of Seistan while it was yet an independent principality.

Everyone was eager to be off after more than two years in the country, though life in Seistan had not been without its relaxations. Sir Henry McMahon is an expert yachtsman, and our fleet of three Berthon boats having been fitted out with sails, the wind, which so often spoiled our pleasure, was utilised in its less frantic moments for our amusement on the waters of the Helmand and the Lake of Seistan. Needless to say, the Mission was equipped with means of entertainment like the gramophone, and probably none of us who resided in Seistan during those two and a half years will ever again listen to the strains of a gramophone without being carried back in mind to Sunday nights in the standing camp, when record after record used to be ground out in the great mess tent to the accompaniment very frequently of a raging wind. To me even the name of the instrument at once recalls the thrashing of curtains and the swaying of the tent in a paroxysm of the "Wind of 120 Days" or in the fierce grip of a wintry blizzard, that nothing could mitigate save the atmosphere created within closed doors—so far as it was possible to close structures of cloth and bamboo—by a couple of stoves, several lamps, much tobacco, and some good whisky.

A great boon, which did more perhaps than anything else to relieve the feeling of isolation, was the excellence of the communications which kept us in touch with the



REGATTA DAY AT THE MOUTH OF THE FARĀH RUD.

(Berthon boats under sail, rigged by Sir Henry McMahon.)

outside world. Our nearest telegraph station was one hundred and eight miles away, but notwithstanding the distance telegrams forwarded to us by horsemen reached camp on the afternoon of the second day. Reuter's daily telegrams, not more than two days old, used to be in camp every afternoon, and throughout the Mission we were able —at headquarters—to follow the course of events that were taking place in other parts of the world, some of which were not without an influence on our own work.

An idea of the organisation of the postal service can be formed from the fact that on one occasion I despatched a letter to Quetta and received an answer on the thirteenth day. Very rarely were letters more than seven or eight days on the way out. The distance from Quetta to our standing camp by the Trade Route, along which the mails were carried, was five hundred and fifty miles. At that time the railway had not reached Nushki, and no aids to progress such as wheeled conveyances were available. The bags were carried by horsemen, or men on the indifferent riding camels of the desert. Parcels up to a pound in weight were carried in the letter bags, which made a very considerable weight for the ponies in addition to their riders.

Once or twice a post bag was lost, the mail rider being held up by outlaws between Quetta and Nushki, and once only an accident occurred, due to an article badly packed. It was, however, a bad mishap. An officer of the Mission had arranged that a bottle of a much advertised hair tonic should be sent to him from Quetta at stated intervals. As the parcel was under the limit of weight, it used to be

included with the letters. On this particular occasion the bottle broke, and by the time that the mails arrived in camp the contents had spread over everything inside the bag. Letters came out in a transparent condition—beautifully scented, but unreadable. Having been away for the day when that mail was delivered, I found on my return the main street of the camp adorned with well-oiled sheets of paper, carefully spread out on tent ropes and bushes. The mystery attaching to this display was solved when, on entering my tent, I discovered my share of oily letters carefully piled on the table. The experience was not repeated, and it was the only accident that took place during the period of two and a half years that we remained in Seistan.

April, 1905, drew towards a close, and the suspense in which we were kept about our departure began to have rather a trying effect on the nerves. At last came the news that a visit was contemplated to the capital, where a round of farewell visits was to take place which would mark the close of our stay in the country.

On the last day of the month I rode towards the city, where almost every other member of the Mission had assembled, and on the way paid a visit to the shrine of Bibi Dost. It was at once noticeable how largely the shrine had been frequented. The earth outside the enclosing wall bore great brown stains where the blood of victims had been poured forth. Those who could afford to do so sacrificed a sheep or goat, or perhaps a lamb or a kid, while the poorer class of pilgrims would probably be able to provide with difficulty a cock for the purpose. Shreds

torn from their clothes fluttered from all the sticks and rods that were placed at the shrine. On this occasion a party of devotees were paying their vows, so it was not advisable to approach too closely. As a rule, the custodians are quite willing to allow "People of the Book," as all Christians are called, to look at everything except the chamber where the so-called tomb of the saint is placed, but they do so when there are at hand none of the country folk, whose narrower prejudices might be scandalised by such a proceeding.

It was a close warm day, and once more on the Zāhidān plateau I was exposed to the attacks of the Seistan fly. It would have been difficult for a stranger just arriving in the country to credit our experience of the hurricane and cold we had endured a little more than a month before; and after a long and tedious ride, over irrigated lands and through canals, it was with feelings of relief that I dismounted at the British Consulate in Nasratābād.

To the people of Seistan all interests centre in what is at once their political and their religious capital. It is possible to be a long time in the country and never hear the name Nasratābād, since in accordance with old custom the place which happens to be the capital for the time being is spoken of generally as "The City," and even as "Seistan." It is this which makes allusions to Seistan in ancient chronicles so puzzling to the reader. It is never clear whether it is the capital or the country that is alluded to.

At the present day Nasratābād is an unhappy-looking

place, from whichever side it is approached. Owing to the apathy of the people, the soil has become water-logged. The banks of the canals have been allowed to fall into disrepair, and the water leaking through them has formed two marshes, one to the north-east and the other to the east of the city. That to the north-east, indeed, was deliberately kept up when we were there, so as to allow the soldiers of the garrison to pasture their donkeys and ponies, without trouble to themselves, close to the fort. The road from the Mission camp to the Consulate passed through the eastern swamp, and rarely did I cross it without a mishap, owing to the slippery nature of the soil, and the pitfalls in which it abounded. Elsewhere also the ground was hardly ever dry. All buildings very soon fall into disrepair on account of the damp rising in the walls; the lower portions rapidly crumble away, and, undercut by the wind, the whole fabric is very soon in heaps.

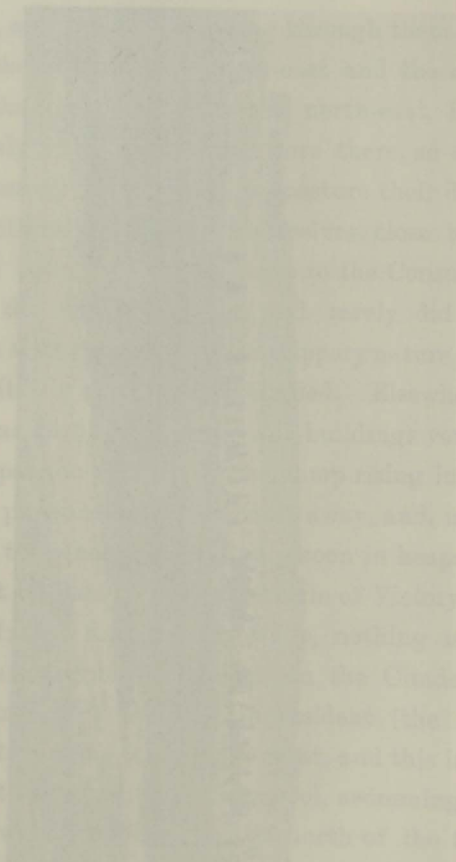
The fort of Nasratābād (the Abode of Victory) is almost a ruin. Inside the decaying walls, nothing is in repair except the Governor's residence in the Citadel, and the mansion in which the Persian resident (the Kārguzāh) dwells. Round the fort runs a moat, and this is used with the utmost impartiality as a cesspool, swimming bath, and source of water supply. To the north of the fort, about a quarter of a mile away from the walls, is a large garden called the Chahār Bāgh, which is the property of the Governor, and which contains not at all a bad house, with one or two apartments above the rooms on the ground floor. The direct entrance is a low narrow door in the



THE MISSION GOING OUT ON A VISIT OF CEREMONY. FORT NASRATĀBĀD IN THE BACKGROUND.

[206]

place, from whichever side it is approached. Owing to the apathy of the people, the soil has become water-logged. The banks of the canals have been allowed to fall into disrepair, [illegible] through them has formed two [illegible] east and the other to the east [illegible] north-east, indeed, was deliberately [illegible] there, so as to allow the [illegible] to pasture their donkeys and ponies [illegible] close to the fort. The road [illegible] to the Consulate passed through [illegible] rarely did I cross it without a [illegible] slippery nature of the soil, and [illegible]. Elsewhere also the ground [illegible] buildings very soon fall into disrepair [illegible] rising in the walls; the lower [illegible] undercut by the wind, [illegible] in lumps.



The fort [illegible] of Victory) is almost a ruin. [illegible] nothing is in repair except the [illegible] the Citadel, and the mansion [illegible] (the Kārguzār) dwells. [illegible] and this is used with the [illegible] swimming bath, and source of [illegible] north of the fort, about a quarter [illegible] walls, is a large garden called the [illegible] the property of the Governor, and which contains not at all a bad house, with one or two apartments above the rooms on the ground floor. The street entrance is a low narrow door in the

wall, with a very high threshold, though a visitor on horseback would have no difficulty in riding in through the gaps in the tumbled walls. As with all things in Seistan, only bits of the garden are kept in order, and at the time of our visit the waste places were intersected with deep trenches where, "please God," trees were to be planted "some day."

Husenābād, the village where the civil population and the chief priest and elders of the people reside, is much better kept than the fort. A narrow glacis divides the two parts of the capital. In Husenābād there are also some very nice gardens, and many a time in the Consulate have I enjoyed grapes sent as a present to the British Consul by the Imam Juma, the High Priest of Seistan.

On the 1st of May the officers of the Mission were invited to dine with the Kārguzāh, the Persian resident, who bade us to what he styled Shām-i-Mukhtasar, an abbreviated or "scratch" dinner. We rode out of the Consulate in an imposing cavalcade, and in due course dismounted in front of the courtyard of our host's mansion. First came, as a preliminary to dinner, tea and cigarettes, which were served to us at a long table in the open air. Then we were ushered into a long narrow room, full of lights and not at all well ventilated, and sat down, about thirty of us all told, at a long narrow table which would comfortably have accommodated a dozen.

The "scratch" dinner consisted of twenty-seven courses. Sweet champagne was in abundance, and an excellent red wine made in the Caucasus, and at one point of the feast

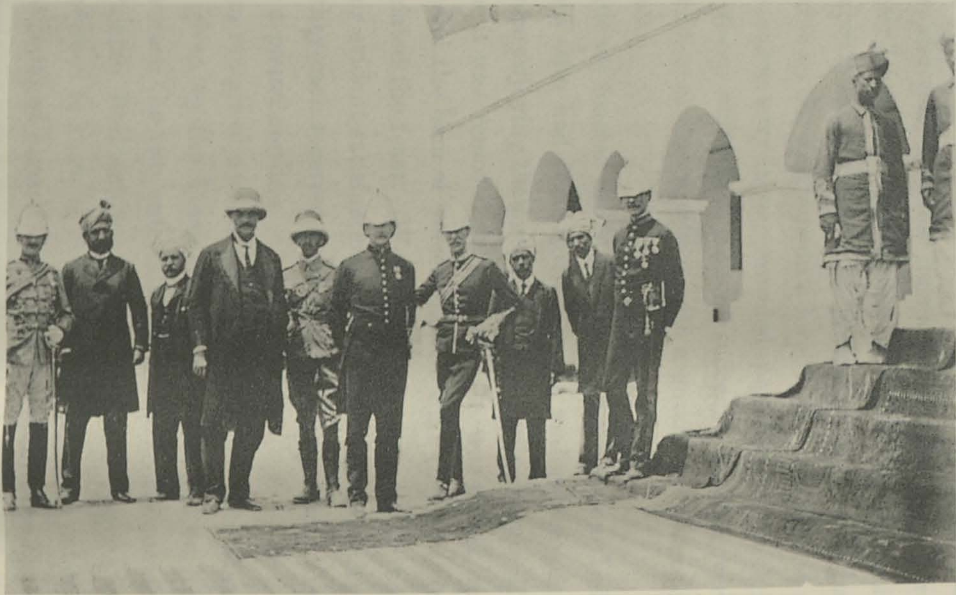
tea was again served in tumblers. The chief dish in the menu was brought in near the end. It was called Dolmah Barré, and was a whole lamb stuffed with a sweet pillau, of rice, almonds, pistachio nuts and raisins, and was served in a very large dish which must have tried the strength of the stalwart serving man who presented it to each guest. Moreover as the dish was on a level with one's face it was by no means easy in our crowded position to attack the whole sheep with any degree of success without covering one's self or one's neighbour with a goodly portion of the contents.

While we feasted inside the state apartment, our Indian servants who had been invited by the major-domo of our host were enjoying themselves in an adjoining room. Each dish as it was removed from our table was passed on to them, and the hum of voices showed that they at anyrate appreciated the feast. We learned afterwards the secret of their evident satisfaction. In addition to a very ample meal, they each received a present of money amounting to nearly a pound sterling.

There remained now the farewell banquet to the Mission to be given by the Persian Commissioner, and we had a day between the two entertainments to recover ourselves. The Persian Resident was an official of a by-gone day. He professed to know no French—at least he did not speak it—and confined himself entirely to Persian. The Persian Commissioner was a representative of the modern official class. He had been educated in the Military School in Constantinople, and spoke French with ease and fluency.

He had, moreover, been closely associated with us during our stay in the country. He had been a frequent guest at our mess, and we were more or less on a footing of friendship [illegible] with [illegible]

The [illegible] his full [illegible] the Chahār [illegible] official, who had [illegible] to make [illegible] The [illegible] official was styled, [illegible] Persian, and was [illegible] His father, [illegible] his [illegible] possible [illegible] and his face [illegible] to learn [illegible] knowledge [illegible] of the party [illegible] good fellow and [illegible] with us, [illegible] where these [illegible] part of the terrace formed by [illegible] platform was [illegible] had been spread [illegible] we were able to pass an enjoyable evening in the open air, instead of remaining in an atmosphere full of the odours of food and tobacco, as at the Kārguzār's entertainment.



THE MISSION AT H.B.M.'S CONSULATE, NASRATĀBĀD.

He had, moreover, been closely associated with us during our stay in the country. He had been a frequent guest at our mess, and we were more or less on a footing of friendship and equality, which was not quite the case with regard to the Persian Resident.

The "Yamin-ul-Nizām," to give the Commissioner his full title, resided in the garden house inside the Chahār Bāgh, which he shared with a Revenue Official, who had been deputed by the Government at Teheran to make certain inquiries into the Revenues of Seistan. The "Mustansir-ud-Daulah," as this latter official was styled, was a charming specimen of a high-bred Persian, but was not acquainted with any European language. His father, he used to lament to me, had been very conservative in his ideas, and had given his sons the best education possible according to the Persian standard, but had set his face against allowing them either to go to Europe or to learn European languages. Although the Mustansir's knowledge of Persian alone had been a bar to most of our party knowing him, he was evidently such a good fellow and always so cheery that he became a general favourite with us.

The upper apartments of the Garden house where these gentlemen lived occupied only a part of the terrace formed by the roofs of the lower rooms. A wide platform was thus available, and over this a canopy had been spread under which we dined in comfort, while after dinner we were able to pass an enjoyable evening in the open air, instead of remaining in an atmosphere full of the odours of food and tobacco, as at the Kārguzāh's entertainment.

The dinner, also, though composed of Persian dishes, was not marred by mediæval profusion. I append a translation of the Persian menu, which I have kept in memory of a very pleasant evening, and which may be useful in dispelling any false ideas as to the extent to which we were debarred from the comforts of civilisation while in Seistan.

Plain Soup.
Dolmeh Barg.
Cutlets.
Chillau, with fine Mince Meat, Sweet Pillau.
Asparagus.
Pudding.

As for wines, our host was able to provide dry champagne, Burgundy, port, and whisky.

Even at the Commissioner's, however, we were not able to forget for long that in Seistan the rags are ever behind the tinsel. The staircase, which was dreadfully steep, had been built with sun dried bricks and clay mortar, like the house itself, and was fallen into sad disrepair. Red cloth had been put down in our honour, but this was trailing loose, and while the steps were not easy by day, at night, by the dim light of one or two lamps at the bottom, it needed very wary walking to reach the ground safely.

We had arrived at Nasratābād at the time of the Easter festival of the Greek Church, and as the Russian Consulate was only about five hundred yards from the residence of the British Consul we were able to hear the Cossacks of the Russian escort chanting their religious and national

airs. The effect of the stately Gregorian music was very fine as the voices of the singers were surprisingly good and correct. Before we left, the Cossacks asked permission to entertain the small party of Indian troops who had accompanied Sir Henry McMahon to the capital, and also the cavalry escort of the British Consul. This was duly granted, and a day or two after the entertainment had taken place our men made up their minds to return the hospitality of the Russians.

The native officers were the hosts. They prepared the programme of the entertainment, and from our mess stores and those of the Consulate were supplied with everything that was necessary to make the entertainment a success. Chief host was the native officer in command of the cavalry portion of the Commissioner's escort—a fine old soldier of a high Afghan family, who by birth and training was well fitted to perform the duties of entertainment on an occasion of such a nature. Our men of course spoke no Russian, nor did the Russians speak any Indian language; but Persian afforded a common medium of conversation, as after the time we had spent in Seistan everybody in the British camp spoke at least a smattering of Persian, and the Cossacks stationed at the Russian Consulate naturally did the same.

After dinner was over the Cossacks gave an exhibition of dancing, and in their long coats and boots the skill and activity they displayed was wonderful. It spoke volumes for the boots they wore that they were able to dance the steps so cleverly and cleanly, for the time was very fast.

The dance was a sort of hornpipe performed by two men, who acted while they danced. Now advancing, now retreating, one of the partners would in dumb show act the part of a suppliant, and this action each pair kept up for a considerable time. On our side the men who were entertaining the Cossacks performed with bared swords the dances peculiar to tribes on the North-West Frontier, which their guests in turn applauded vigorously. Finally, before the party broke up, the Cossacks gave us an exhibition of singing. The man who sang the air, a tenor, stood in the centre of a little group, each of whom took a part in the refrain. The tunes generally were of a most sad and melancholy nature, and some of the time was so slow and the music so majestic that it appeared as if the men were singing religious airs.

The dinner and reception given by our men to the Cossacks of the Russian Consulate took place practically at the end of our stay in the capital. Our last calls had been paid and only a few had to be returned, after which there was no further reason for us to defer our return to the standing camp. Accordingly by the end of the first week of May we were back on the plateau overlooking the Helmand delta, and now it was only a question of waiting for the telegram which should announce our release. At last it came, one night as we sat outside the mess tent after dinner. The wind had sprang up again, but the wind interested us no more. The wind gauges had been dismantled and it raged in vain; and as if disconcerted at the little attention it received it subsided again without comment.

There remained the farewell Durbar, which was fixed for the 15th May. Once more and for the last time, the ante-room of our mess hut was draped and carpeted. At midday our friend the Akhundzāda with his train was received, and after his departure the Yamin-ul-Nizām arrived. Then the assembly broke up, and we took our places outside the mess hut to be photographed for the last time in a group. After that there remained only to change into our travelling garments and ride to the camp that had been formed in advance—the first camp on our homeward journey.

When I reached my hut it was dismantled, with the exception of my wife's picture in its accustomed place on the wall and a few necessary articles. All the other poor fittings that had helped to make life endurable had been packed up and were now miles away. For the last time I walked round. It was perhaps not very much of a residence, but it was weather-proof. It had sheltered me from the sun and the wind and the cold, and it was not in the nature of things that I should leave it without some gratitude in my heart to the rough walls and roof that had played their part so well. Outside, however, the riding camels were fidgeting, and there was no time for sentimental reflections. A hurried change of clothes, and a hasty packing of the picture on the wall and my other belongings, and then we were off.

Only one of the three columns into which our great company was divided remained for the night in the otherwise deserted camp. The desolation and quiet of the town

(for it was a town in size) were in strong contrast to the bustling life that had filled its streets a few hours previously, and the effect was heightened by the cries of a tame wolf which had been the property of an officer's servant. Bought two years before as a tiny cub, she was now turned adrift to fend for herself, and, unaccustomed to freedom, the wretched animal prowled among the deserted huts and howled throughout the night. When the third column marched out early the next morning the wailing note of the wolf-bitch sounded mournfully in their ears.

Now at last all were homeward bound. We had learned much and had been through much since we entered the country two and a half years before, and the return journey seemed a comparatively simple matter. There was none of the work of the outward march. The columns made straight for the wells of Muhammad Reza Khān, and there we struck the Trade Route and had nothing to do but follow it to rail-head at Nushki.

# CHAPTER XIII.

## SOCIAL CONDITIONS.

Miān Kangi and Shahristān contrasted—Native architecture—Ingenious ventilation—Native dogs—Gardening—System of government—Ancient agricultural associations—How the canals are repaired—Towns and population—Yearly rebuilding of the Band-i-Seistan across the Helmand—Opium—Fondness of the native for barter—Saiads and the "priestly families"—Religious beliefs Education—Legend of the Malik's daughter—Art—Metal work—Pottery—Weaving—Carpet-making among the Baluchis—Baluch women compared with those of Fārsiwān—A lady mayor—Dress—Intermarrying.

The story of the Seistan Mission is ended. In these concluding chapters it is proposed to give some particulars of the life of the people of Seistan, and of the great river that flows through their country, for which it has not been possible to find place in the preceding narrative.

The part of Seistan where for the time being the bulk of the population has been gathered together in villages and townships has always been spoken of as the Shahristān. In modern times this district has been the area lying to the west of the Pariun. It is in marked contrast to the Miān Kangi, on the east of the Pariun, where the only permanent traces of man's abode, apart from some four villages, are the ovens which all classes, nomad and agriculturist, use for baking their bread. The ovens are like truncated cones open at the top, and in course of time their clay sides become so thoroughly baked that they endure long after a hamlet or collection of blanket

tents has been removed. As has already been seen, the Miān Kangi is a great jungle. In the Shahristān, on the other hand, jungle is nowhere to be found. In some parts the people are reduced to burn dried bushes of the alkali plant and camel thorn, and a load of tamarisk fuel is a present which even men of substance are glad to receive.

No little skill is shown by the Seistanis in adapting themselves to the conditions by which they find themselves surrounded. Their dwellings are admirably designed to suit the climate. Every house is provided with ventilators, the shafts of which pass into the dwelling rooms between double walls. The roofs are lofty domes, and there is plenty of head room inside the apartments. The entrances are placed in the side of the building which faces the south-east, the opposite direction to that from which the wind blows. The usual plan for houses used by the wealthier classes is to have a lofty Aiwan, or adit, whose tall and wide arches form a very handsome feature. From this hall, doors, made as low and as narrow as possible, give off on either hand into large vaulted rooms.

There are many points in which the indigenous architecture is better suited to the climate than buildings designed on an European plan. The thick adobe walls and the lofty dome render the apartments cool in the summer, and the numerous ventilators make them still more pleasant as dwelling places. Domed apartments in the winter are, however, very chilly unless good fires are maintained continuously, and the public rooms in the

British Consulate used at times to be unpleasantly cold, notwithstanding the warm and generous hospitality dispensed within their walls. Fires are not easily kept up in the tract to the west of the Pariun, owing to the scarcity of fuel already alluded to.

The ventilators of the houses are a conspicuous feature of every village. The ordinary pattern of ventilator used in Seistan is a cowl, or hatch-like opening much narrower than its height. The long narrow opening is turned slightly away from the usual direction of the wind, and faces the north or a little to the east of north. This is done to break the force of the wind, for if it blew directly down the shaft of the ventilator when a gale was raging, all the contents of the room below would fly out at the entrance. There is always a rush of air down the shaft, and the Seistani regulates this by the very simple expedient of building up the mouth of the ventilator to suit the weather that prevails at the time. Domed roofs sometimes have a ventilator like a lantern with openings round it, placed at the top of the dome, and as this is finished off with a cupola, it forms a handsome addition to the dome.

The dwellings of the lower classes are small. They are placed side by side inside a courtyard, and as each has a gaping arched entrance the interiors are open to the inspection of all who pass by. On the windward side in each there is a false window, arched and outlined, which is filled with a heavy masonry lattice with small apertures for light and air, and the draught is regulated by the simple expedient of plugging the openings with a small clod of earth kept in position with the help of a little wet

clay. As the weather becomes more severe, a greater number of the openings are closed, and as summer returns they are gradually opened again.

In severe weather the population will be found basking in the sun on the leeward side of their houses where the entrances are to be found. Here groups of both sexes may be discovered lolling against the walls. Men, women, and children of all ages may also be seen sharing with poultry and gaunt evil-looking dogs, the warmth of the heaps of manure that litter the yard. The dogs, however, generally prefer to lie on the roofs of the low dwellings in which their owners live; or upon the tops of the walls enclosing the courtyard of the tenements. A stranger passing through a village is followed by these animals who run along the walls, barking and snarling at the intruder, often within easy reach of his face, until he rides out of the narrow village street. This, as often as not, is a modified irrigation channel—a hollow way between low banks, on which stand the walls of tenements or gardens. Long years of traffic have trodden the earth down, and the people do not scruple to excavate shallow pits in the track in order to obtain material for repairs to the walls. In addition, the lanes are crossed by irrigation cuts of all sizes, some of which may be wide and fairly deep, so that riding is not an easy task.

Rarely is a village so poor that it does not possess a garden on its outskirts. Very often it is the property of a Saiad, or some member of a family of priests who resides at the place. At a distance no one would recognise the existence of a garden, owing to the high prison-like walls

that are necessary to protect the trees within from the ravages of the wind, and it is only as the wayfarer rides through the village that he obtains a glimpse of what is inside—a carefully tended garden, verdant with beds of lucerne, and gay with the white and purple blooms of the poppy, which, with the glossy foliage of rose bushes, of pomegranate shrubs and of vines, make a charming contrast to the dreary expanses of dilapidated walls that form the setting of the picture.

Each township is under a Mayor or Kad Khuda. He is not elected by the inhabitants, nor is the office strictly hereditary. Anyone can become a Kad Khuda, but a man whose fathers before him have held office commands respect which is denied to the upstart. The Kad Khuda's house is frequently of superior type to the generality of dwellings in his village. It is usually placed in the middle of the main street. On one side of his front door, in a sheltered spot outside, there is a platform where someone of his assistant officials may usually be seen lounging and dozing. Here also the Mejlis or assemblies are held, the notables of the village sitting on the platform, and the lower orders anywhere they can. When anything of importance is on foot the people are summoned to the assembly by the beating of a great drum, whose booming notes are heard for far enough around. In a country where the rule of conduct is to say, "I go, sir," and to go not, it is convenient that the Kad Khuda should have this means of summoning a meeting, as the tell-tale sound proves whether or not his wishes are being made known.

There is a peculiar system in force with regard to the cultivation of the land held by each township. The inhabitants form among themselves associations called Pāgos, each of which, we were informed, is composed of six men. These associations are regulated by the heads of each township, and vary in number each year according to the land that is to be placed under cultivation. Lands taken up in the Miān Kangi, for instance, are cultivated by associations whose actual homes are situated to the west of the Pariun, when these outlying lands are included in the jurisdiction of a head-man, whose township is situated in the Shahristān. It is owing to this that so many of the settlements in the Miān Kangi are merely temporary, as the inhabitants are not native to that part of the delta, but merely cultivate land there, on a very short tenure.

The partners in each Pāgo share equally in the outlay necessary for taking up lands. They also divide what amount of profit may result from their labours. In the Afghan portion of Seistan the partners in each association set apart one man to be on the spot in the village to discharge the corvées to which they are subject. This man takes no share in the work in the fields, and is called the "dead man." The other partners are able to devote themselves uninterruptedly to agriculture.

There can be no doubt that this system is of very great antiquity. It would seem highly probable that the name Pāgo is from the primeval root which occurs in the Latin Pagani and the Early English Pagi (adopted from the Latin) which was the sub-division of a hundred. The

outlying rural communities, from which our word Pagan is believed to have been derived, were probably groups of cultivating people who occupied lands at a distance from the parent township, which was a centre of civilisation and refinement, just as in the Miān Kangi the Pagani (Pāgos), who dwell in rude huts on the land they till, in very many cases belong to the larger townships of the Shahristān where are to be found such refinement and civilisation as exist in Seistan.

The great drawback to the prosperous working of the system is the very short tenure on which the Pāgos have to take up land. The latter being the property of the State, no one has any right to it. Each Pāgo has to pay a fee, which theoretically must not exceed sixty krans, before it receives a grant of land, and not only is this grant for only a single year, but the Pāgo has no idea where the land will be situated. In this respect the members of an association are absolutely at the mercy of the head-man, and do not know beforehand whether they will have to cultivate lands in the Shahristān or be called on to move into the Miān Kangi. Lands are not assigned till just before it is time to commence operations, and having paid their fee the members are not in a position to refuse to go. Under a system such as this it is impossible to expect an association to go to any trouble in the way of cultivation beyond that which is absolutely necessary to secure a profit during the single year that its members work the holding.

Other conditions are also discouraging to enterprise. The revenue tax alone amounts to practically half the

yield from the lands taken up by each group of partners, and from the Kad Khuda to the humblest person filling any sort of office, all dip their hands into the remainder. Each person's share has been fixed from time immemorial, but no Pāgo expects to escape with payment only of its due share. Just as the Governor of a Persian Province or district, farms the revenue of the territory over which he rules, so does the Kad Khuda farm that of the one or more townships he holds. If there are more than one he lives at the most important, and is represented by a deputy at the others. He is allowed a rebate for his own maintenance and remuneration. Out of every ten Pāgos one is set apart for him, and naturally charges of favouritism are not lacking when the time for the distribution of land comes round. With respect to this Pāgo, the Kad Khuda occupies the position of the State and receives the share of the produce which the State would have demanded. For his benefit, also, the Pāgo discharges the corvées for which it is liable.

Under the Kad Khuda in every township is a group of officials, creatures of his, chief among them being the Mir Ab, or irrigation expert. He it is who has to report to the Kad Khuda all requirements in the way of silt-clearing and repairs to the embankments of the canals, whereupon the Kad Khuda details a certain number of men from each Pāgo to carry out the work, all of whom have not only to give their services but to provide their own food. Here again, as might be supposed, the system does not work out at all well. The canals generally leak when there is a good head of water in them, and

large areas of land are every year water-logged, greatly obstructing communications. The main canal, the Rud-i-Seistan, at one part of its course fills a depression from half-a-mile to a mile in width and from two to three miles long. As a class, however, the local irrigation engineers must possess a very good eye for level, as the whole of the canals were carefully examined while we were in Seistan, and in no case was any one found to be badly aligned, though owing to the work being carried out by the townships length by length, unnecessary bends are only too common.

Townships are fairly numerous, though often very small. At the time of our sojourn they numbered 363 in the Persian part of the delta. Only three had a population of over five hundred families; two contained an estimated population of from three to five hundred families; and of the remainder many were little better than hamlets. The total number of families was estimated at 21,171, of whom 15,622 inhabited the Shahristān. These figures do not include the garrison nor the Governor's followers.

The population of the whole delta may be set forth as follows:—

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Persian Territory. | | |
| Shahristān ... ... | 15,622 | Families. |
| Miān Kangi ... ... | 5,549 | „ |
| Afghan Territory. | | |
| Chakānsur District ... | 16,272 | „ |
| Total ... | 37,443 | „ |

The population is much denser on the Persian side of the frontier than on the Afghan side, where there are about sixteen families to the square mile against twenty-six families on the Persian soil. Allowing for purposes of calculation 4·3 persons to a family—the average of observations in the case of between forty and fifty families among the agricultural classes—we find that in round numbers the total population in Persian territory is 91,000 and in Afghan territory 70,000, or altogether in the delta 161,000.

There is no doubt that the population in the Helmand delta has varied greatly at different periods of history. Judging from the ruins of all descriptions I estimated that just before the invasion by Timur, near the end of the 14th Century, the population must have numbered about a quarter of a million. On the other hand, in 1872, when Seistan had been almost depopulated during the period of anarchy through which it had passed, Sir Frederick Goldsmidt placed the population at no more than 45,000.

The great event of the year in the lives of the people, greater even than the Nauroz Festival, is the rebuilding of the Band-i-Seistan or Band-i-Kuhak, the weir across the Helmand close to the fort of Kuhak. This work may well be regarded as of supreme importance. The Pariun, owing to the plateau of Zāhidān, commands next to no land on its left bank, and the whole of the cultivated area to the west is irrigated by the main canal called the Rud-i-Seistan—the River of Seistan, which takes off from the Helmand just above the weir. Unless there is a good head



MINARET OF ANCIENT MASJID, NEAR ZAHIDĀN (BUILT A.D. 1156).

The Fragment is 75 feet in height.

of water in the main canal, the distributaries in very many cases will contain no water, and since the floor of the main canal itself is some three feet above low water mark in the Helmand, the commanding part played by the weir in the prosperity of Seistan needs no emphasis.

As soon as ever the floods commence to decline and the water in the Helmand to fall, there is a very marked diminution in the discharge of all the distributaries, and eventually the greater number of these dry up. The summer harvest has then been gathered in. The Government demands have been satisfied. Everybody who can establish his right to do so has helped himself out of the poor cultivator's share, and the time being almost at hand to commence the ploughings for the autumn sowing, water is again needed.

The edict goes forth that the weir must be reconstructed, and the Kad Khudas bestir themselves. People who can afford to buy themselves off do so; those who cannot are ordered to give their services in building the weir. A great camp is formed on the bank of the river, and all who are too old to take an active part in the work are utilised as cooks and attendants. Fascines of tamarisk twigs are made, and after lines of upright stakes have been laid out, the fascines are placed in position.

The weir is built in two parts; one from the Persian bank and the other from the Afghan side of the river. The point of junction is the apex of an obtuse angle which points up stream. As the deep water channel lies closer to the Afghan bank, the section built from the Afghan side is much shorter than the Persian section. The force

of the current being exerted at the apex, the water pushes against the whole weight of the fascines, which packed together are able to offer a successful resistance to the river till the heavy floods come down. As nothing but fascines are used there is a considerable escape of water through them, which relieves the pressure on the weir, and at the same time allows the canals below to be filled. The top of the weir forms a causeway some ten feet wide and about five hundred yards long.

In 1904 the work was commenced about the middle of August, and occupied just a month. From first to last about forty thousand men were employed on it. Altogether something like 450,000 fascines, or bundles of tamarisk branches, were used, equivalent to about two thousand tons of fuel.

The Seistani, notwithstanding his many grievances, is a merry soul at heart, and with a little encouragement is willing to talk freely—especially to one who knows his language well enough to speak it without the intervention of an interpreter. The people have few or no amusements. A clever story-teller draws large audiences, and these assemblies are held on the comfortable side of a wall, according to the season and the weather that prevails. Elderly gentlemen do not consider a game of marbles incompatible with their dignity.

The use of opium is very general. Women as well as men are addicted to it, and are said to administer it to their babies in order to soothe them. The upper classes have nothing to occupy their minds, or to fill their leisure. For them there are but the petty intrigues at the small

court of the Deputy Governor, or the Persian Resident—the Kārguzāh. The remainder of their time is passed under the influence of opium. That the lower orders, the Kuls, should use it, is not surprising, exposed as they are to the effects of damp and miasma from the irrigated lands on which they work. Their poverty, however, preserves them from over-indulgence, as the very narrow margin of profit that is left to them is only earned by unremitting toil.

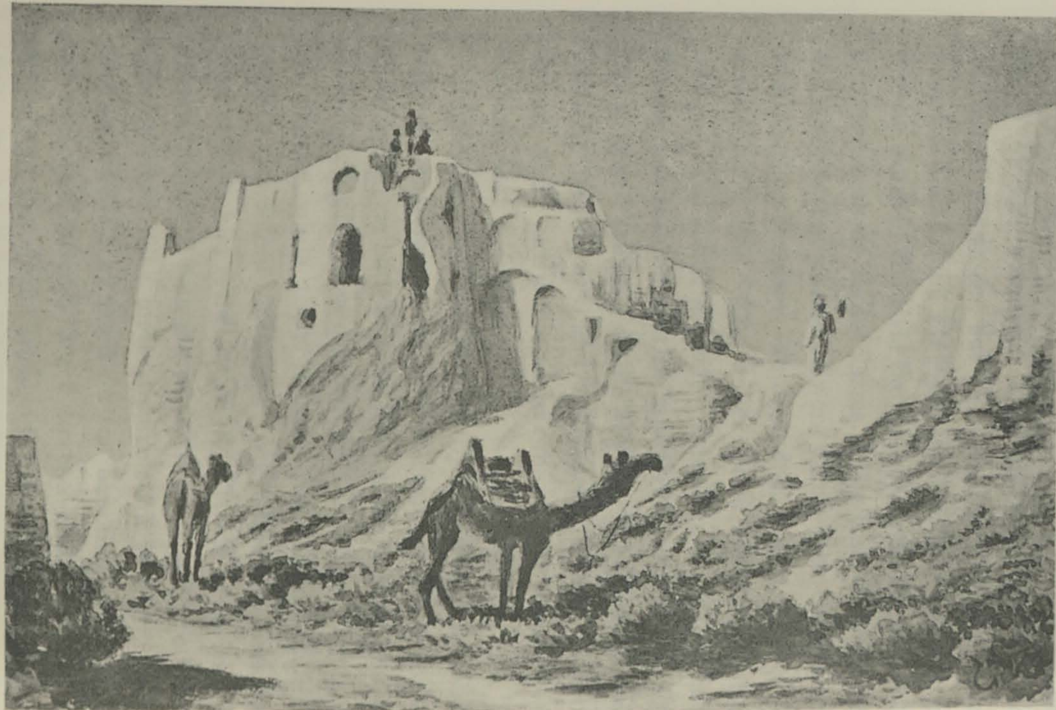
The native of Seistan is by nature a peddler. He is always ready for a deal, and will barter fowls for fuel, boots for melons, or grain for either. The want of capital is, however, a great hindrance to trade as we understand it. Previous to the Mission of 1903 a large proportion of the people had never even handled silver money. In 1899 I was compelled to send to the village of Chilling in order to change a few rupees of Indian currency into Persian coin.

In those days enterprising persons used to collect perhaps a dozen camel loads of local produce, which they afterwards carried to Quetta. The money realised was there laid out in cloth and merchandise of various sorts, and after the trader had taken his fill of the delights of the bazaars and the sights of the place, he commenced his dreary homeward journey. Trade on a larger scale was carried on by a few persons in Bunjar or Chilling, but they dealt with Birjand and Meshed, where they were known and where their credit was good.

The cause of this restricted commercial development may be found, in part, at any rate, in the conditions of

anarchy which prevailed before the Persian Government intervened, which acted most disastrously on the prosperity of the country. The one class who not only weathered the storm, but who added to their possessions, were the Saiads and the "priestly families." The superstitious fears of the rival Baluch claimants for supremacy enriched both of those classes. The lands they held and the villages they possessed were refuges in the midst of bloodshed and rapine. To them flocked all those who had something to lose. The trader found security in a Saiad village. The helot was safe on lands owned by a Saiad. No one was rash enough to interfere with or oppress the "hamsāyah" (clients) of the Saiads. This class, notwithstanding its bigotry and selfishness, formed the only barrier that existed against the awful tyranny and violence that prevailed.

In general, the Seistanis are by no means fanatical in religious matters. Portions of the same tribe are in many cases settled on both sides of the boundary, and those who are subjects of Persia conform to the State Church and are Shiahs, while their brethren, as Afghan subjects, profess the Sunni doctrines. All alike are extremely superstitious, and resort largely to Ziarats or shrines, and the custodians of such places derive no small profit from their visitors. The most popular saint is Āmrān, whose principal abode is situated on the outskirts of the waterless and ruin-covered tract to the east of Nād Ali; offshoots of this shrine are also found in one or two places within Persian territory. Another very highly regarded saint is Bibi Dost, the Lady of Mercy, whose shrines, a



RUINS OF ZĀHIDĀN. THE BOWER OF MALIK KUTB-UD-DIN'S DAUGHTER.
(*From a Drawing by the Author.*)

we have already seen, are largely resorted to by those who have been bitten by rabid animals. The Fārsiwāns of Seistan are somewhat notorious for their lax ideas, and the Baluch (who are Sunnis) declare that the former pay great respect to, and in fact worship, an evergreen variety of the tamarisk species. This is the Kora Gaz, a tree which grows like a cypress and resembles one in appearance from a distance. It is not unworthy of note in this connection that cypress trees were regarded with a certain veneration, and were planted by Zoroaster himself. Their perennial greenness and foliage probably caused them to be regarded as an emblem of the truth of his teachings through all ages, and it would not be long before a tree originally planted as a witness would come to be regarded with religious veneration.

Education is confined almost entirely to the male population. It is allowable they say, for any one to educate his daughters to a very modified extent. A girl may be taught to read, but writing is a forbidden accomplishment, and it is regarded as one that may be the cause of untold mischief, as in the case of the daughter of Malik Kutb-ud-din—she whose bower is pointed out among the ruins of Zāhidān—who is accused of having betrayed the weak points of the then capital of Seistan to Timur Leng.

The Malik's daughter, who was famed for her beauty and accomplishments, had long been enamoured of the Great Conqueror, and when he laid siege to Zāhidān, she wrote him letters, which she fastened to arrows and discharged from her bower into the hostile lines. She told him the secret of the underground supply of water (which

is said to have existed) and it was cut off, and in consequence the capital was forced to surrender. After the fall of Zāhidān, Timur is said to have married the Princess, she having stipulated for this as the price of her treachery. But he was not easy in his mind, and lest she should betray him as she had betrayed her father and her country, he gave orders for her head to be cut off when he was on the point of leaving Seistan. So perished Kutb-ud-din Shah's fair daughter, and for ever after she has served as a terrible example—to be cited by all who regard the education of females with a doubting eye—of what may happen if women be taught to write.

Where so much has decayed, it is not surprising if the arts are ill represented. The difference between the state of affairs at the present time and that which prevailed many centuries ago is very marked. The people who inhabited the ruined forts and manor houses of the Sarotār district must have been able to appreciate works of art, and also must have had the means to indulge this taste. Some beautiful intaglio seals were brought into camp, while the survey of the district was in progress. On small polished bits of cornelians, amethysts (both purple and white), on a substance that looks like jade, and on moss-agates, the artists of those days have left some choice specimens of their handiwork. As a rule the better and highly finished bear representations of human figures and heads, the details of which must of necessity have been executed with the aid of a magnifying glass, so delicately are they wrought.

In the present day at the capital, and in the large and

flourishing village of Bunjar, there are so-called workers in the precious metals, but these are chiefly engaged in trade as armourers, and even as architects and builders. As already stated, gold and silver are very scarce indeed in the country, and ancient coins which the treasure seekers find in the ruins are greedily bought up by those who wish to indulge their wives by a present of jewellery. Head ornaments are made from the coins, and also from old intaglios, but the setting is painfully crude and contrasts very unfavourably with the delicate and finished workmanship of a bygone age.

For centuries the fortunes of Seistan have been on the down grade. Before Persian intervention, anarchy and bloodshed raged unrestrained for the space of fifty years, and as the descendant of an ancient race native to the country said to me among the ruins of the city of Zahidan, the present inhabitants are incapable of emulating the works of their forefathers, "because the life-blood has been drained from our veins."

To-day the sole surviving manufactures are those absolutely necessary to meet the daily wants of the impoverished population. Pottery of only the commonest description is made. The pieces are often misshapen, the ware is inferior and badly baked, and a crude attempt at glazing the outside intensifies the inferiority. The forms and patterns are those of antiquity, but the workmanship is of the worst description. Similarly modern buildings are slovenly, and their lines are out of the perpendicular; unbaked brick and "pisé" are still used, but the minimum of labour is expended on the work.

The only other ancient handicraft which is carried on is that of weaving. The coarse cotton fabrics used by the people generally are manufactured by male weavers. Even so far back as the tenth century of our era, authors who wrote about Seistan mention the existence of colonies or settlements where the men followed this profession. Dr. Forbes, who lost his life in Seistan in 1841, also noted the industry, and was much struck by the resemblance of the operatives to the now extinct class of hand-loom weavers in Scotland. The Seistan weavers appeared to him remarkable for their intelligence, as well as being given to political disputations, and for being "possessed of a quaint and independent humour, very different from that of the generality of Persians." This description applies equally well to the hand-loom weavers of Seistan at the present day.

The cotton yarn is spun by the women, but it is prepared for the loom by the men, and the latter make it into cloth. The process is still a feature that attracts attention as the wayfarer rides through a village. In what may be called, by courtesy, the village square, sometimes as many as a dozen men may be seen seated at their looms, on the comfortable side of a wall which protects them from the wind. Protection from the sun is provided by a light roof resting on poles in front and on the wall at the back. A long trench is dug for the accommodation of the weavers, who sit on a bench out on the far side of the trench with their feet inside.

Among the Baluchis, on the other hand, carpet-making is carried on entirely by the women of the family, while

the men help in preparing the wool, in dyeing it, and in the other preliminary stages of the work.

The patterns are committed to memory, and in many cases have probably been handed down from generation to generation for centuries past. If an exceptionally good carpet, with new variations of an old pattern, or a new design altogether is available, it is sometimes borrowed as a pattern, but this is very rarely the case.

Work is laborious and progress is slow. About an inch deep strip of a carpet some four feet wide represents a very good day's work. If there is need to push the task to a completion relays of workers are put on, and they sit at the loom from early morning until it is too late to see the stitches. To finish an inch a day requires very hard and unremitting work.

The principal colours are indigo and madder. The leaf of the wild pistachio (gwan) is used to obtain a black colour. Willow leaves are used for the greens; and the leaves of the pomegranate bush, or tree, are added to pure madder to produce a brighter tone, or an orange, or merely to enliven the somewhat dull hue of pure madder. White is of course the pure wool carefully bleached. Goat hair is sometimes used, instead of dyeing wool black, and the yellow and dun wool of a young camel is always used for any part of a pattern where such a shade is required.

For mineral dyes resource is had to professional dyers. These dyes are styled "Jauri," or poisonous, which sufficiently indicates their nature.

The defects in Seistan carpets are due to the conditions under which the work is carried on. The irremediable

defect is want of symmetry, which is due to the rollers over which the warp passes being not parallel to one another, which makes the ends narrower than the middle and destroys the appearance of the finished article. When a carpet has been finished the selvage at both ends is woven into a brilliant patterned drugget. The stitches, being drawn very tight, contract the warp, and then when the carpet is spread, instead of lying flat, it cockles. This defect wears off in time after the carpet has been trodden down. The Persian always treats a carpet specially to make it lie properly.

For a pile rug or carpet eight feet long, by about four feet wide, forty pounds of wool are said to be necessary. As a rule pile rugs or carpets should be sold by the square yard, while the price of druggets—which are as good as, if not better than, the rugs and carpets—ought to be fixed by their weight.

Small articles such as saddle-bags, nose-bags, haversacks, and pillow slips often are very superior pieces of work, and the specimens made by the Baluch girls are taken as the standard of their value in the marriage market.

In their private lives the Baluch women have much better reputations than their Fārsiwān sisters. The latter are said to be addicted to intrigues and to be unfaithful to their husbands. So long as their infidelities are confined to their fellow-countrymen and co-religionists, the husbands are complaisant, and difficulties arise only when an intrigue with a foreigner has been detected, and a scandal ensues. A marriageable girl is bought outright, her price being in proportion to her good looks. The

business is settled by her parents, and she has no voice in the matter. The average Fārsiwān leads a life that takes him away from home, and his wife has no lack of opportunities for clandestine meetings. In a Baluch camp on the other hand, there is no privacy whatever. Hence it may be that the boasted superiority of Baluch women in this respect may be due to the absence of opportunities. Moreover the Baluch woman is rarely good looking, and she ages more rapidly than her Fārsiwān sister who is very often comely to a degree.

Even in a remote little country like Seistan—a backwater of civilisation, undisturbed by the forces of progress—a woman was found in 1904 who exercised the jurisdiction and powers of a mayor. Townships are invariably named after their Mayors or Kad Khuda, and the Lady Masumā (the Virtuous) had duly given her name to the township she ruled—ruled moreover with conspicuous success, for her continuance in the office inferred her qualifications to hold it. She was known also as the "masculine woman"—another touch of the human nature which makes the whole world kin.

The ordinary dress of the Fārsiwān woman is a long and loose shift reaching to her heels. Women of the upper classes dress in the same fashion, but are able to command better material, and the lady's person is adorned according to the means of her husband. The poor man's wife goes unveiled as she has to do her share of work, while her richer sisters, kept jealously cloistered, indulge in petty jealousies and intrigues, and temper the boredom of their lives by the use of opium.

The men of the upper classes wear the Persian frock coat and trousers. On the head a felt cap and a white or coloured turban. The Saiad is always known by his large black turban and black coat. The Kul-Helots, or the labouring classes, dress in a blue cotton blouse, fastening by a button on the left breast and with loose, but short, blue cotton trousers. The Persian Abba or cloak corresponding to the Indian Choga is always worn by well-to-do persons—the merchants, literati, and upper classes of the population.

In Persian Seistan the Baluch holds himself aloof from the Fārsiwān, whom he despises. In Afghan territory, where both Baluch and Fārsiwān are under the heel of the Afghan, Baluch and Fārsiwān intermarry. The result of such marriages is a very peculiar type that is at once recognisable. The individuals are taller and larger framed than either their Baluch or Fārsiwān parents, but in their complexion the offspring of such marriages favour, as a rule, the darker countenance of the Baluch.

The Fārsiwān population of Seistan bears a curious resemblance both in feature and in physique to the races of the Punjab; and this resemblance is not accidental, but is due to an affinity in race which throws a curious and interesting light on the migrations—voluntary and enforced—which have influenced the population of Seistan.



LOOMS IN A VILLAGE SQUARE.

# CHAPTER XIV.

## THE HELMAND.

The name "Helmand" Great area of the Seistan Lake—The source of the river—The ford at Girishk—Major Tod crosses the river on an elephant—Tributary streams—Valley of the Helmand—Possible diversion of its course—Its periodic rise—The rivers that feed the Seistan Lake—Area of the lake dependent on the height of the Helmand—Natural high-water gauge—Years of drought and flood—Advance of the water into the empty lake—Cultivation of the bed of the lake—Pasture lands The silt—Subsidence of the Seistan area—Historic records of the course of the Helmand—Future possibilities.

According to local traditions the name of the River Helmand is a corruption of two words—"Hir," meaning "water," and "mand," a common suffix that implies "abounding in."

It is on the Helmand that the Seistan Lake is dependent for its existence, though the area draining towards the lake embraces various other streams. In its fullest extent the catchment area of the lake covers something like 150,000 square miles. It is a vast depression of irregular shape, with a greatest length from north-east to south-west of about 600 miles, and a greatest width of about 350 miles. Little more than half of this area, however, can be regarded as an effective source of water supply. Both the Helmand and the other streams flowing towards the lake have to pass through wide tracts of

barren country, exposed during the greater part of the year to fierce heat and swept by winds of terrific velocity. In short, all the conditions are most favourable to evaporation. To what extent this reduces the volume of water in the rivers it is impossible to say, but some observers have hazarded an opinion that as regards the Helmand only about one-tenth of the water contributed to that river and its tributaries succeeds in reaching the Seistan Lake.

The Helmand takes its rise among the mountains to the north-east of Kabul. The road from Kabul to Bamian crosses what is regarded as the main stream some twenty miles below its source, though another headstream, alongside which the road runs after crossing the river, is said to bring down as much if not more water than the Helmand. Dr. William Griffith determined the height of the crossing to be 10,522 feet above sea level; and he describes the stream formed by the two branches as flowing down a comparatively wide and partly cultivated valley. Another officer has described the Helmand at this point as a shallow stream, and its banks, unlike those of the Kabul river, as bare of trees and shrubs but tolerably well clothed with grass. Lower down, the banks are fringed with wild roses, and as the valley widens the settlements of the Hazarahs at one time enlivened the landscape.

Between the point where Griffith crossed the Helmand and Girishk, a village almost due west of Kandahar, nothing at all is known of the river except from native information. The average fall of the river-bed is probably not less than thirty-five feet in a mile, while above the crossing it cannot be very much less than a hundred feet

a mile. At Girishk there is a ford which is practicable for foot passengers when the river is low.

Conolly crossed the Helmand at this point in 1832, on his overland journey from Europe to India, and recognised the limits within which the water channel is to be found by the fact that there had once existed two forts on the opposite banks of the river, and only the landward side of either fort had been fortified—the inference being that when they were built the river had provided a sufficient protection on the unfortified side. Six years later Major Tod found the river flowed two miles to the east of the modern fort of Girishk. The country between he described as a "chaman" (pasture of meadow land) intersected by watercourses. The Helmand was about a thousand yards wide, "but in the spring it is said to spread itself over the low ground, on its right bank, and sometimes to approach within a few hundred yards of the walls of Girishk."

The boat usually at the ford had been destroyed, and Major Todd crossed the river on an elephant, "the water being in some places about seven feet deep." Three weeks later (towards the end of June) the river had fallen four feet, and even then it was barely fordable by infantry.

Below Girishk the fall in the river-bed diminishes rapidly. To the point where the Helmand empties itself into the Lake area is less than two hundred miles as the crow flies, but before it reaches that goal the river has to make a big detour to the south and cover a distance from Girishk of something like three hundred miles.

About thirty or forty miles below Girishk the Helmand receives on its left or eastern bank the waters of the Arghand-ab (so named from the strength of its current), which is by far its most important affluent. The Arghand-ab itself represents the union of several important rivers. Some seventy or eighty miles above its junction with the Helmand it is joined on the left by the Dor, which in turn, further upstream, has received on its right bank the Tarnak and the Arghassan.

Best known of all these tributary streams is the Tarnak, because the high road from Kandahar to Kabul passes up its valley. Of the Arghand-ab very little is known. Various travellers describe it as flowing through a well-cultivated and populous valley with many forts. The average drop has been estimated at eighteen feet a mile, and so strong is the current that the river is considered impassable when it contains more than three feet of water.

The river which is called the Dor—that is, simply "the stream"—where it joins the Arghand-ab, is known nearer its source as the Kadanai. Before reaching it both the Tarnak and the Arghassan are at times nearly depleted of their waters by the demands made on them by agriculturists for the purposes of irrigation. The gravitation of the subsoil water brings a very fair supply into the bed of the Dor, but the salts washed out of the earth in the process naturally give to the water a somewhat brackish flavour. All three rivers—the Dor, the Tarnak, and the Arghassan — rise in a mountainous region along the eastern borders of the Helmand basin, where recent

formations of friable conglomerates and gypsum-bearing clays are to be found; and it is most likely rainfall in this region which is responsible for the thick red discharge that finds its way into the Seistan in the months of July and August, and temporarily raises the otherwise moderate level of water in the Helmand at that season of the year.

The united waters of these rivers and the Arghand-ab join the Helmand three or four miles below the ancient site of Kala Bist. In this section of its course, from Girishk down to the eastern elbow of the great bend, the fall of the Helmand may be estimated at about six feet in a mile. From this point onwards the fall again diminishes rapidly as far as Khwāja Ali; it is perhaps not more than three feet in a mile. Below Khwāja Ali up to the head of the modern delta the gradient becomes very regular and may be taken roughly at about two feet a mile; while in the delta itself the river falls at the rate of about a foot and a half a mile.

The valley of the Helmand below Khwāja Ali, where it runs almost due east and west, presents a very peculiar feature. On the north the valley hugs closely the edge of the Dasht-i-Margo, while to the south it is separated from the basin of the Gaud-i-Zireh only by a watershed which in places is a mere dividing wall, on which the effect of the wind's action can clearly be traced. Abreast of Rudbār the valley is three hundred feet higher than the Gaud-i-Zireh, and the narrow trough in which the Helmand lies, though all the time descending gradually towards the west, never reaches the level of the Gaud.

The cutting action of the wind on the dasht between the Inferno of Seistan and the Helmand has been noticed in the course of the narrative, similar action is going on along the southern confines of the valley, and in course of time, very many centuries hence, it is possible that the Helmand will either turn into the Inferno or into the Gaud. Already there are subterranean leaks in the southern watershed, and the salt springs on the side of the Gaud-i-Zireh undoubtedly owe their existence to the waters of the Helmand.

Where the Helmand enters the delta it was estimated that during floods the river flowed at the rate of about four miles an hour. The commencement of the great rise in the river is marked by the bursting of the Band-i-Seistan, the great weir at the take-off of the Rud-i-Seistan. This usually occurs during the first fortnight of March; in 1904 the date was the 9th of March. Subsequently there is a steady rise of water, and in April, May and June the Helmand is at its highest.

In 1902 the weir was actually burst about the middle of December, but that was an exceptional year when the bed of the Helmand below Chahārburjak was dry for seventy-two days, from the end of June till the second week in September. The weir of that year was a very poor structure, as the people were too exhausted to build it properly—hence the unusually early date of its giving way. While the Helmand was dry in 1902, the sands that had accumulated on the Zāhidān ridge were blown across into the unoccupied bed of the river, and drifts were formed of such size and to such an extent as

to conceal the channel in places. On the other hand, at Nād Ali the remains of buildings were laid bare in the river-bed some eight to ten feet below the top of the banks. As the channel refilled the drifts were gradually washed away, but it was not till early in January, 1903, that water was available in the canals for irrigation.

In the last section of its course the Helmand pours its waters into the lake area from south to north. The principal other river channels that run into the lake reach it from the east and the north. They are, in order, commencing on the east, the Khāsh, the Khuspās, the Farāh, and the Hārut. All are of the nature of torrents, rising swiftly and subsiding almost as rapidly. For the greater part of the year they contain no flowing water in their beds for some distance above the lake.

Practically the Khāsh River ceases to exist as a permanent flowing stream at the oasis of Khāsh. Below that point the forts along its banks need to have wells inside their walls. The channel is fairly well defined down to Chakānsur, and can be traced till it finally loses itself in the eastern pocket of the lake area—the Hāmun-i-Puza. As in the case of the Helmand, the spring is the season of the heaviest floods, and at that time of the year water in considerable volume finds its way into the lake after irrigating the lands round Chakānsur.

The Khuspās Rud enters Seistan through a well-marked gorge in the last line of cliffs overlooking the low country; but before reaching the lake it dwindles to a narrow ditch full of brine and fringed with reeds, and no flood water came down it during our stay in Seistan.

The river of Farāh drains in its upper course the Ghur country, noted for its inaccessibility, the strength of its fortress, and the turbulence of its inhabitants. The river takes its name from the district of Farāh, along its middle course, which at one time was very celebrated as a grain-producing district. Floods of great violence sweep down the river, and even in its lowest course are said sometimes to last several days. The strength of the current on such occasions is attested by the masses of driftwood, including whole trees, which have been brought down by the furious rush of water and deposited on the mud-flats at the mouth of the river.

The Hārut Rud, formed by the union of the Adras Kand River and the Rud-i-Gaz, enters the head of the Sāwari Hāmun, about twenty miles to the north of the mouth of the river of Farāh. Like the Khuspās, it very rarely adds anything to the volume of the lake.

The Bandān River, on the west, discharges its flood waters into the lake no more than once or twice in five or six years; and to the south of that river the insignificant streams that issue from the hills either die away in the plains or break up into a multitude of channels, some of which reach the lake, but scarcely ever contain water.

None of these supplementary sources of supply constitute a factor of any real importance in the formation of the Seistan Lake. Everything turns on the Helmand. When that river runs dry, as in 1902, there is no lake; and when its floods run higher than usual, the lake is larger than usual.

On the west the shore-line is fairly constant, but on the

east the limits of the lake are quite indefinite. First fills the tract west of the mouth of the Pariun, then, as more water comes down, it spreads on the one hand into the eastern and northern pockets of the lake area, and on the other southwards, where in years of exceptionally high floods—"years of Noah" as they are called—water may even pass down the Shela into the Gaud-i-Zireh.

In these circumstances it is obviously impossible to say in general terms that the Seistan Lake covers so many hundreds or thousands of square miles. All that can be said is that at such and such a time it occupied such and such an area. In 1903, when the maximum discharge of the Helmand was only seventy thousand cubic feet a second, a tract of country two thousand square miles in area was covered with water. In 1904, when the discharge was very little more than half as much, the area under water was not more than twelve hundred square miles.

On one of the spurs of the Kuh-i-Kuch, an isolated hill which rises on the northern shores of the Hāmun-i-Sāwari, can be traced the high-water marks left by the floods of several seasons. The highest of all is five feet above the level in 1903, and when the lake established this record the discharge of the Helmand must have been not less than 200,000 cubic feet a second, while the area submerged would be about twice as great as in 1903. In all probability the year which saw such an expansion of the lake area was 1885, that being the latest "year of Noah"; for the face of the natural rock-gauge scales in time under the influence of damp and heat, and would not possess the records of ancient lake levels.

Very little evidence, indeed, exists as to either the years of exceptionally high water or the years of drought. Both are long remembered in the traditions of the people, but unless they have occurred near the time of some well-known historical event, it is extremely difficult to fix their dates even approximately. Occasionally some other clue is afforded. Mr. A. G. Ellis, of the British Museum, informs me that a local historian alludes to a flood in Seistan of such an abnormal height that the "City of Seistan" was for months accessible only by boat. Now there is only one site in Seistan which could be thus isolated—the plateau on which stand the ruins of Zāhidān; so that city must have been the capital at the time of the flood, the date of which may consequently be fixed as either the end of the tenth or the beginning of the eleventh century of the present era.

Nothing is known of any other "year of Noah" till after a very long interval of time, even then the date cannot be fixed more exactly than between 1692 and 1722 A.D. Rather more than a hundred years later we find Captain Edward Conolly recording that in 1830 a tremendous flood came down the Helmand and formed a new channel for the river in the delta. The year 1866 was another year of high water, and this was followed by the last great flood of 1885.

Less still is known about the years of low water. One occurred about twenty years before the great flood of 1866, and then the Helmand is said to have had no water in its bed (within the delta) for a fortnight. In 1872 the river was dry for three weeks, and reference has already been

made to the great drought of 1902, the year before the British Mission arrived in Seistan, when the Lower Helmand was empty of water for over a couple of months.

Unfortunately in 1903 we did not realise at first the exceptionally favourable opportunity afforded us of examining the lake area while empty of water. We saw, however, something of the flowing in of the water in the main arm of the lake. By the end of the first week in May the water was abreast of the Kuh-i-Khwāja, having advanced about six miles in eight days. Six weeks later the water had only just made its way—but on a very broad front—as far south as the bay in which the well of Muhammad Reza Khān is situated. The first water entered the Shela about the end of June, and by the middle of July there were three feet of water at the point where the Nushki-Seistan Trade Route crosses that channel.

Very roughly it may be said that the water advanced south at the rate of about half a mile a day. No water at all managed to make its way through the Shela into the Gaud-i-Zireh. A good deal had found its way through in 1885, and for several years afterwards shepherds were in the habit of resorting to the Gaud, and used even to grow crops in a small way so long as the water remained fairly sweet. Even nowadays after heavy rain shepherds will pasture their flocks for a very short time on the banks of the Rud-i-Kuchk, which descends into the Gaud-i-Zireh from the water-parting between the Gaud and the Helmand. But such relief to the general aridity of the country south of the Helmand is only momentary, and practically the Gaud-i-Zireh may be regarded as a vast sterile depression

covering about a thousand square miles, half of which area is a glaring saline flat.

The annual advance and recession of the waters of the Seistan Lake, though varying from year to year, enable portions of the lake area to be broken up and cultivated at regular seasons. Moreover, the reed-beds which occupy the margins of the lake constitute the chief pasture lands of Seistan. Cattle may be seen grazing up to their backs in water, as they do in Sind. While the lake is full the cattle are watched by the servants or slaves of the large proprietors. The herdsmen shelter themselves in the same way as the cattle they tend, that is simply by a lofty screen of rushes, strengthened with tamarisk boughs, and erected across the direction of the wind. Men and women huddle together on some mound above the reach of water, and present a very unhappy and wild appearance. The most acceptable present to a group of these people is a box of matches. Matches are only procurable in one or two places in the country, and if the fire goes out some one is obliged to go to the nearest village on the mainland and bring back, with the greatest care, a piece of smouldering cow-dung. One or two "tutins"—the narrow cigar-shaped rafts made of reeds which are used on the lake—provide the herdsmen with means of communication. These rafts are very buoyant, and in 1904 the Governor's brougham and the wagons of The Russian Trading Venture were ferried across the lake on a number of them fastened together.

The reed-grown area is divided into localities which correspond to townships on the mainland, and in its way

the marshland is as productive as the arable land, for not only do the graziers pay taxes, but the agricultural associations (Pāgos) would at times be hard put to it to plough their lands were it not for the cattle they are able to hire from the graziers. The owners of the cattle, no less than the actual herdsmen, appear however to be ill at ease with strangers. It is noticeable that they use the old Seistan dialect more than any other class in the country.

Not only are portions of the lake area cultivated from time to time when left dry, but it is evident, from the remains which have come to light, that certain parts used to be permanently occupied. This is more particularly true as regards the Hāmun-i-Sāwari which now flows over the ancient town of that name. For centuries the north-west part of the submerged area must have been dry land. Those who have seen the site of the town at seasons of exceptionally low water say that the remains are those of brick-built walls, and that the disposition of the streets or lanes between the buildings can still be traced. Relics which were brought to me from this place are in every respect of the same character as those from the ruins in the Sarotār district.

A question which has exercised much thought about the Helmand delta and the lake area is what becomes of the silt brought down by the river. Every ounce of water holds in solution a certain number of grains of silt, the greater part of which is deposited in the submerged area. The accumulation has gone on and is going on continuously and must, one would think, be raising the level of the lake floor because there is nothing to carry away the silt.

Yet, if there were no counteracting influence, this raising of the level round the mouth of the river ought to force it back into channels higher up. The exact reverse, however, of this has been the case, and hence it may be suggested that, while the Helmand is constantly bringing down fresh silt, the process of subsidence to which the Seistan depression owes its existence is still continued, perhaps intermittently, but on the whole at a regular rate.

None of the silt deposited in the area under water is removed by the wind, and it is only very rarely that more than a fraction of the lake area is absolutely dry. Moreover, the small areas laid bare by the seasonal shrinkage of the discharge of the river are dry precisely during the period—from October to March—when, except for three or four blizzards of short duration, there is no great wind to scour the country in the way it is swept in the summer by the Wind of a Hundred and Twenty Days. Even in the case of the irrigated lands above the submerged area it may be reckoned that the loss by erosion during every summer is more than balanced by the deposits of silt that reach the land through the irrigation channels. Some explanation would therefore certainly seem to be needed of the fact that there is no appreciable difference produced over a large number of years in the relative level of the delta.

If the supposition that the process of subsidence is still going forward be correct, then the changes which have taken place in the course of the Helmand may be due to other forces of Nature than those directly observable. From the brief records of events when Seistan was conquered by the Arabs, it is known that in the eighth

century of the present era the Helmand flowed into the northern (and present) delta. There is no evidence when a change actually occurred, but probably by the end of the eleventh century the river had gone back to the Rud-i-Biyabān channel, and it had been found necessary to construct the famous Weir of Rustam in order to keep the abandoned channel supplied with water and provide the means for irrigating the lands around the capital. The weir was destroyed by Tamerlane in January, 1384, and for a short time the river flowed unhindered down the Rud-i-Biyabān. Then was built the weir called the Band-i-Bulbaka, close to Rudbār, which kept up a good head of water in the canals taking off above it on the right bank. But the greater part of the discharge of the river still found an outlet through the Rud-i-Biyabān into the western lake area and the Gaud-i-Zireh.

Some time in the thirty years between 1692 and 1722 the Helmand returned to its long-abandoned channel leading to the northern delta, and to that it has remained faithful up to the present time. There have been variations of course in the branch by which the river discharges the bulk of its waters through the delta into the Seistan Lake, but for the past quarter of a century at any rate the Helmand has been covering with water very much the same tract in the lake area that it is covering at the present day.

How will the Helmand change its course in the time to come? Change there is bound to be if the history of the past affords any guide to the future. Will the river circumvent the plateau of Zāhidān, which at present bars

its progress westwards? Will it, when the forces of erosion have completed their work, break away further upstream, and turn north into the Inferno of Seistan, or south into the Gaud-i-Zireh? Speculation is fascinating but futile. The future course of the Helmand and the future position of the Seistan Lake are the secrets of the future; and one can only hope that the Arbitration Award which kept a Mission of over fifteen hundred people at work in Seistan for nearly two and a half years will not be impaired in value by any serious shifting of the river for a long time to come.

THE END.

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